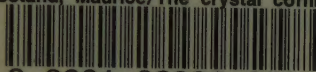


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MAURICE ROSTAND



LES FLEURS DE FRANCE

VOL. IV.

THE CRYSTAL COFFIN

BY

MAURICE ROSTAND

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THE CRYSTAL COFFIN

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By
MAURICE ROSTAND

*Translated from the French, with an
Introduction, by*

ALYS EYRE MACKLIN



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INTRODUCTION

Maurice Rostand is handicapped by the inheritance of a great name. He is the elder son of Edmond Rostand, creator of the immortal *Cyrano de Bergerac* and other heroes who almost invariably personify big aims, heroic courage, and perhaps exaggerated self-sacrifice; of Edmond Rostand whose "unrivalled virtuosity" glitters in *Chantecleer*, *La Princesse Lointaine*, *l'Aiglon* and other masterpieces; of the wealthy Edmond Rostand whose banker-father, himself a poet, wrote verses in adoring praise of the child Edmond's "inimitables tours de phrases"; of Edmond Rostand, elegant and exquisite, who died prematurely just before this book was written . . . On the mother's side there is also an exacting heredity. Rosemonde Gérard is not only the grand-daughter of Napoleon's marshal, the victor of Wagram, the victim of Moscow and Waterloo: she is one of the outstanding women-poets of France. This is how Madame Duclaux speaks of her in *Twentieth Century French Writers*:

At one-and-twenty years of age, Edmond Rostand published his first volume of verse, and

shortly afterwards married the beautiful young poetess of Les Pipeaux, three years younger than himself. I can remember Rosemonde Gérard in her nineteenth year, a vision of loveliness, when, one evening, in the salon of the old poet, Leconte de Lisle, she stood up, so slender, so smiling, so ravishingly blonde and fresh, and recited a lyric as charming as herself. Madame Rostand has a talent of her own, simple, sincere, femininely sentimental. All the lovers in France know her *Chanson Eternelle*:

Car vois-tu chaque jour je t'aime davantage,
Aujourd'hui plus qu'hier, et bien moins que
demain."

With such blood in his veins, cradled and brought up in the heart of all that is most brilliant in the brilliant world of French letters and art, that forcing-house for talent, it seemed that something in the way of literature must inevitably happen to Maurice Rostand. It did—for here is the indictment of the Universe and Himself (for is it not written in the form of an autobiography?) which he has entitled *Le Cercueil de Cristal*.

Which brings us to the book. Perhaps what impresses most is the sincerity of its exalted outpourings, and their power of stimulating thought and association of ideas. Reading it, I was haunted by the vision of de Musset's *Enfant du Siècle*, that type of a generation of war-children decadent because of the conditions of their birth and upbringing, those unfortunate beings "conceived of war-exhausted

fathers between two battles . . . educated to the sound of drums among the ruins of the past, with nothing sure for the future . . . who looked at each other with sombre eyes as they felt their puny muscles, and grew up doubting everything, believing nothing, Children of Despair"; I saw the scorn in the eyes of the "marvellous boy that perished in his prime"; I found my thoughts leaping to the hero of d'Annunzio's "Triumph of Death"; I re-lived with painful intensity one of the most tragic happenings of the Great War, the sacrifice, horrible if inevitable, of so many beings designed expressly by nature to create or to regenerate Beauty, whose too-finely strung bodies and brains made them more unfit for the hell of the trenches than the ordinary C.3 man.

But the real motif of the book is the strained relationship between a parent and child, the inability of the youth to break down the barrier of misunderstanding rising between himself and the father he idolised, so that eventually, though they lived under the same roof, they were practically strangers to each other. And this in spite of the fact that at one soft look in the "dear eyes," at one affectionate word from the lips too often set in judge-like firmness, the youthful vices of the superficially-corrupted boy would have fallen from him like a mantle, and with the French emotionalism we are apt to scorn, but which has often much to commend it, he would have rushed like an eager child to "fling himself" into the arms of his "Beloved," longing to weep there, to be comforted into forgetting that the moonbeams are "like the rays of my heart, which seems dead though I am only twenty."

As a matter of fact, this strained relationship was not intended to be the motif of the book. This personal side should have been secondary to another—the clash between the ideas of the father, a celebrated philosopher, a great writer and a burning patriot, and those of the younger man, who, even during the Great War, would sacrifice all to humanitarianism, to the Conscientious Objections of the too highly-civilised Idealist. It is only natural that the humanitarian author, writing in the first person, should let the human side dominate, and that the reader should end by dwelling exclusively on it.

The English version of *Le Cercueil de Cristal* cannot excite a tithe of the interest created by the original in Paris, where twenty thousand copies were sold at once. Its touches of real autobiography, the very slightly-veiled allusions to and descriptions of well-known people, created a sensation, and while the music-halls and café-concerts canonised the author by making him a butt for their wit, the critics agreed that though the volume was lyricism carried to excess rather than a novel in prose, it was a “moving confession” that placed its author among the prominent young writers of the day.

As a Human Document we offer it in English to the readers of *Les Fleurs de France*.

ALYS EYRE MACKLIN.

PART I

THE CRYSTAL COFFIN

I

De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine.

September 1, 1917.

Why should I write this?

No matter what I may do or what I may think, I shall die, and it all will be as though nothing had ever been. I shall carry away with me when I disappear all that was true in me and all that was false. A few friends will keep me in mind, and then they also will die.

They also; their mistakes, their truths, their lies will sink into that broken corner of earth we call a grave, into that gaping mouth which opens to take back whatever has escaped from it; and then, no matter what I may have accomplished, what my face may have been like, and what expression my features may have assumed, there will be nothing in all the wide world to bear witness with certainty to my having passed through it.

So long as there shall remain beings who have seen me, who perhaps have loved me, who know the sound of my voice and may still be moved by the recollection

of it, so long as there shall remain faces to which my kisses may be memories, I shall not be wholly dead.

So long as in this life there shall remain beings who have not forgotten me, whose thoughts revert to me because they remember the expression in my eyes, to whom the different aspects of my personality will in some measure thus be still living, so long as there shall remain beings who have spoken to me, desired me, caressed me, looked at me, wept for me, nay, even detested me, I shall not be wholly dead.

Some sort of existence will still be mine on this terrestrial star, and the heritage of my memory may still be the means, as it were, of stretching out my hand and manifesting my presence. Some sort of existence will still be granted me: a second-hand existence, but an existence none the less.

But on the day when the last person that knew me vanishes, I shall die finally and for ever. Scarcely will that last breath be drawn and I shall cease to be even a personal memory. Thereafter I shall be no more than a supposition, not even a certainty; a mere tradition; a certain number of letters cast haphazard into a baptismal name that might never have belonged to anyone. And even if it had, what difference would it make? What superiority would it confer? What advantage?

And now that I have again convinced myself of the uselessness of all things, now that once again I have the taste of dust and ashes on my lips, shall I have the courage to sit down and dwell on the pathetic events that surge up in my memory? When one thinks as I think, to have to write what I have lived, what I am living, what I shall live presently . . . it is like fixing on sheets of paper the nightmares that

have troubled one's sleep. Nevertheless I will do it. I shall indulge the useless pride that insists on sending the story of my life forth into the void. I shall be like the prisoner for whom death is the only avenue of escape, yet who watches the reflection of his face in the shining pool of his labyrinth.

I shall endeavour to make this wretched book—uttered as a cry—an invincible friend who will carry to future generations the assurance of my presence. Neither death nor corruption can touch it. Indeed, there shall be within it a spiritual something snatched from the perishable which can never be destroyed. I have one month left in which to write this supreme Journal of my Soul. Nothing shall prevent my completing it. Like the Slowacki character, created out of the very stuff of dreams, I challenge Fate herself to bar my purpose. Blind Saturn, mysteriously determined that no human being shall erect to himself an indestructible statue, would have to come in person to stay my hand. Death himself, with his ice-cold touch, must stiffen the fingers which hold my trembling pen if he would prevent the completion of my tale.

Thus from me who am so humbly, so terribly mortal, who am surrounded by the dead and am infallibly doomed to pass into nothingness, something will issue that I have forbidden to die.

When my last friend—oh, who will you be, my final assassin?—shall vanish from this world, when those eyes whose glances, meeting mine, have been impregnated with something of my personality, shall close for ever bearing away with them my last spark, the leaves on which I have transcribed the story of my life shall remain to testify that I, too, once lived among men.

The things I have touched, the jewels I have worn, the faces I have caressed, the lips that have met mine seeking wondrous suffering, the landscapes over which my eyes have roamed with peculiar intensity, the setting of my death-agony—be it in room or under the vault of heaven—the very mirrors in which I have looked, including that which, laid on my dead mouth, shall reveal no blur, all these things shall retain of me no vibration, no expression, no glance. In vain shall I have suffered terrible pains in one room, shed in others the most exhausting tears, bestowed the most ardent kisses; nay, have spangled a whole city, as it were, with my youth and my pleasures and that corruption which, perchance, was only one of the forms of my unrest; in vain shall great spaces have sounded for days with the echoes of my joys and my crimes—nothing, nothing shall remain! No phantom of ourselves, however subtle, lingers on in the places where we have lived.

I have revisited, like a mourning Olympia, the home of my childhood, where my father brought me up without understanding me, where I have seen his face bend down towards mine out of a fog of misunderstanding with so disconcerting and so pitiful an expression. I have seen all the places that are bound up with the tragedies of my soul and those of my family, including the tall stone cross under the shadow of which the women of our race have prayed for centuries, so that the cross itself seems but a manifestation, modelled in stone, of their unceasing appeal to God. I have changed the positions of all the portraits in which all the spectres I bear in my blood smile their hereditary smiles. I have searched along every path, looked in every nook of the old house

where so much has happened, where hearts once beat so loud—but there is nothing left. How much better were actual pain than this annihilation. Gladly would one run the risk of even death to see an adored spirit, rather than feel in all these places the impression of grey solitude and ruin which the fire in one's own heart can do nothing to light up.

Let those who have clung to the hope that they can reconstruct past scenes abandon all idea of trying to revive the past. All is dead.

Yes, of me who was once young, beautiful, beloved, unique, nothing will survive; of me who only gave way to despair because I hoped for all, of me whose youth seems to go back to the far distant past, no more will remain than of other human beings worthy only to be my slaves. For me, who have dared to live as if I had several souls and several lives, who have had in myself a complexity of sentiments that made it seem as if I bore the whole of humanity in me, there will be but one death and but one oblivion! The world is unjust. No beauty, no distinction, no superiority confers the power of overcoming Time's ponderous laws. It is only from this book, which I shall write in the spirit of a scientist who is eager, ere he disappears, to record the terms of his formula, it is only from this book that I look for somewhat less ingratitude.

Love, the delight of pleasing, ambition, luxury, all those masks of domination, and of that imperial lust to live which is at the bottom of us all, are but varied forms of our dread of death. Whatever comes our way, affections, paintings, inspirations, travel, is but shifting sand on which we swiftly-passing travellers seek to write our names and leave our mark. Human thought is like those great mirrors in the haunts of

pleasure on which successive generations have scratched their names with a diamond. Human hearts are full of similar deep inscriptions which timid lovers hoped would protect them from forgetfulness. Ah! could only something of ourselves survive, were it but like the ashes that recall Erostratus . . . So everyone, from the summit of his Hill of Self, burns, for coming ages to see, a pathetic Temple of Ephesus.

Thou shalt be my immortal Ruin, O Book in which I shall burn myself. In thee shall the world, as on the slopes of a Grecian hill, behold the treasure which is my Self, slowly dissolving. Of those who loved me, how many still live? One alone survives, whom I shall never again behold. My image in those others is already effaced: those who may yet love me shall also die.

When the youthful Endymion felt himself beloved by Diana, what cared he that he was bound to die? He was leaving behind him something imperishable, were it only the grief of his extinction. Alas, primitive mythology dwells now only in books: no longer are there Goddesses to show us favour; no longer Gods to bear us away on eagle's wings; no longer do young and beauteous Immortals come down from on high to whom I might say: "Bestow your love on me! What matter whether I be a marvel that shall perish, since you, for ever living, will keep the sweetness of my dead caresses, since you will burn forever with the kisses I shall have given you!" . . .

But why care for Love? Why ponder on desire? How empty is voluptuousness! How little there is in the urn she bears on her shoulder! What man is there who, homeward returning in the grey dawn following a night of debauch, and seeing the level white

rays of the morning sun shine on the carts of the market-people, has not suddenly found his own heart filled with disgust?

And ideas? Where are ideas that can give life? All these fine words are empty as village town-halls. Country! honour! duty! I know of no ideal convincing enough to induce me to offer myself to march under its banner excepting only death. So Book of my last breath, you, and you alone, shall defend me against that last judgment of annihilation to which I am condemned beforehand by the concurring centuries.

To that eternity of men fashioned from death, and destined to utter destruction who shall come after me, who will supplant, though they cannot replace me, you alone shall bear sure witness that such an one as I did once exist. You alone shall inform others that neither my intelligence nor my comeliness will wholly disappear from this world in which I once had place. And future generations may sometimes turn and look back, as towards a solitary, albeit brilliant star, and see this enigmatic torch that I have not handed on.

II

Life's daily dulness.—(JULES LAFORGUE.)

September 2, 1917.

Julien de Chevrelle said to me once: "At the very moment when one has made up one's mind to die, something is sure to occur to keep one from doing so; you are startled by a letter, or you meet somebody." And he added, angrily twisting his fluffy, fair moustache, "It always makes you determined to decide to die very often in order that something unexpected may happen to you."

Nothing unexpected will happen to me, for I know all things, and happiness itself can never come near me again. Did anything unexpected happen to poor Julien when he was found dead in Algiers, in front of his big table, among his books, sitting as quietly as if he had smoked a cigarette to the end?

And all the other people I have known and who have deliberately put an end to themselves, all those who have cut, as did Alexander, that Gordian knot which cutting does not unravel, did anything unexpected happen to them, anything that for a single second could turn them away from their woe and make them see, as it were, a deep opaque rose in the night of their despair? No, nothing happened to that poor little Pierrette Verney who had such

queer lovers and so susceptible a heart, and who was found dead in her house at Chantilly with a wad of cotton soaked in ether on her mouth . . . Yet it was a glorious autumn day . . . The stable lads were singing English songs . . . The Diana Avenue was strewn with October leaves . . .

Nothing happened to Christine de Merville, a sort of cousin of my own, who never succeeded in loving her husband, and whose little boy lying in its cradle, unable yet to speak, must have looked at her that night on which she made up her mind to die with eyes at once tender and frightened, since, before killing herself, she drew a large veil over his face and put cotton into his tiny ears so that he should not hear the shot that slew her, the shot that turned her, as she lay at the foot of the tall wardrobe, into a long white form scarcely more substantial than a tulle dress dropped upon the floor by merest chance.

Nothing happened to Andrès de Larma, who deliberately let his horse walk into the stream and throw him off there like a useless burden, Andrès who need only have made one movement to save himself, yet did not make it, who died with the taste of weed in his mouth, and, below him, the dark reflections of the pine-trees in the lake.

Nothing happened to all these men and women—why should it happen to me?

III

Somewhat later. *September 2, 1917.*

I was born in the spring of 1892, twenty-five years ago ; just as many years behind me as there are days ahead of me.

The moment of birth is at least as amazing as that of disappearance. Yet why do not I, who have such a dread of nothingness, I who feel it so acutely that merely to think of it at times makes me wish to cry out, why do I not dread the nothingness before my birth as I dread that which is to come ? Do we not stand between two abysses the one as void as the other, the one bounded by our birth, the other by our death ? Why then, do we not dread the one which lies behind us as we do that which lies ahead of us ? How comes it that we dare bend over the edge of one and not of the other ?

Before my birth, before that particular day in 1892, there lies for me a void, a universe in which I have no place, peoples that were unaware of me, intellects that flamed up and went out, unaware that some day I should appear . . . And I gaze upon them, I read the works of those beings who were living when I was dead—for one was just as much dead when one was not, as when one has been. Marvellous is the peace, the courage, the stoicism with which I bend over that

precipice. But the one that lies before me, right there—dare I gaze into it, can I bear it? Can I, without my teeth chattering with fear, imagine the peoples that will be born after me, the minds that will shine after I am no more, the universe that shall live when I am dead? The void which yawns at my feet, that other void to the idea of which I ought by now to be used, I cannot conceive without an insurmountable horror, I cannot gaze upon without a cry.

Of all the proofs accumulated by the world's credulity to assure itself that there is such a thing as a soul, the only one I can accept is that which I derive from my sensations (and from my sensations only) of the restful tranquillity of what lies behind me, contrasted with the terror that awaits me. Since I do not feel the void behind me, it is because there is no such void, because something of me, mysterious, sacred, has passed through the ages, a star long invisible which shone ere it revealed itself.

Alas! This is no doubt mere fancy, yet another illusion . . . I have not lived before. The void, ready to engulf me, is dreaded by me only because I have tasted the poison of personality, because I have squeezed and crushed like a grape the forbidden mysteries of individual life . . .

IV

September 3

I was born where I shall die, in the same part of the country. How monotonous at bottom are all things, what uniformity in diversity! The lives of all men are like those dramas of Shakespeare which, after throbbing through scores of scenes, have only shown two or three settings: a castle, a garden, a battle-field, a tomb. Everything happens there, familiar objects return as *leitmotivs*, and he who is about to die beholds with his last gaze the things he saw at the moment of birth.

I have insisted on having the details of the day of my birth told me so often that I know every minute of it. Down to its simplest details, it is like a story I have learned by heart.

It was in our old country-house, near Aigues-Mortes, where my father almost always lived, and there, where he had spent part of his childhood, my childhood was passed. He had settled there immediately after his marriage, and used to spend several months there every year. He was fond of this melancholy house, less splendid perhaps than the mansion which had fallen to his brother's share, but filled with such peace and such peculiar charm that life seemed to flow away with no perception of the passage of time.

Although the greatness of his name always gave him the feeling that he was the head of the family, my father was the younger son. He had an elder brother who inherited, on my grandfather's death, the ducal title and the family seat.

I scarcely knew that uncle of mine who died young ; he had married late in life, and at his death he left his name and property to a child of seven. The only recollection I have of him is a visit that my father and I paid to him at the Château de Merville when I was a little child.

It was on an October evening, and we arrived late for dinner. My uncle de Merville was alone in the great park, a felt hat pulled down on his face, surrounded by some of his many dogs. I did not like the castle or the park. I noticed that my uncle was very unlike my father, but very like my grandmother, with her cold and haughty expression, and that he had a way of cracking his whip which filled me with profound admiration. The brothers lived in different parts of the country ; my father spent long periods in Paris, and in his country home ; a certain coolness sprang up between the two brothers, which only increased with years ; these causes combined to my not seeing my uncle again. Try as I may, the only impression I have of the Duc de Merville is of a lithe, pale man, wearing a felt hat, whipping his dogs in his park on an autumn afternoon. My second meeting with him was at the time of his death, one of the earliest impressions of my twelfth year, to which I shall return later.

When I was born, the members of my family who were to figure in my childhood, were few and scattered ; my mother, who was to vanish so soon that I am

not sure my memory of her is more than the impressions made upon me by what has been told me about her, my father's two sisters who, though married, continually visited us in the country, and my grandmother, the old Duchesse de Merville, who did not get on with her other daughter-in-law, and used to spend months at a time in the Aigues-Mortes mansion by way of consoling herself for her enforced absence from the seat which had been her home and which she had been forced to leave.

I must linger a moment to speak of her. There must be in her a tremendous vitality, for she has buried her children and does not appear to have any intention of dying herself. At this very moment, when the second generation from her is about to disappear, I am sure she is living over there, still exactly the same in every way. No doubt she aged early in order to avoid having to change herself later, and to enable her to make no alteration, decade after decade, in the indefinable and unchanging vision which she has impressed upon our memories. As I knew her when she was forty, so she is now at sixty. And I do not believe that, except for being a very little paler, she will look any different on her death-bed.

At the time of my childhood she had a colourless face, with clear-cut features, hard, almost cruel, and with eyebrows that made a sort of imperious double diadem on her forehead. She had never left off her mourning for my grandfather, who died two years before I was born, and she had no intention of doing so. And indeed, once grant that the sombre uniform is assumed in memory of a loved one, and it is difficult to admit that it can ever be discarded. Shall we allow that the laws of society and our own heart's

forgetfulness can fix a date at which grief shall end, at which the remembrance of those who have gone shall be put aside with the crape veil? Let those who go into mourning ever remain in mourning: such was my grandmother's view, borne out by her prematurely faded hair, her thin, dry lips, her whole face deadened, as it were, long before its time.

I could not blame her for her devotion to sombre vesture, for I myself would have shared it. Besides, life, which makes one death follow another in large families, never gave her sufficient time ever to enable her to go out of mourning, unless she ran the risk of inviting questions whose intrusion into her inner life she would have hated. She was always able to hold the death of some relation responsible for her unchanging black and the mourning border of her note-paper: her distant cousin de B. . . . or her poor cousin Hermione.

But in the name of what extraordinary affection did she desire thus to perpetuate her grief? Had she really loved anyone so greatly, when it seemed that everyone counted for so little with her? Had she known that awful solitude which makes life empty because one beloved being has passed away? O sombre phantom of my childhood, did your eyes really ever weep, your heart ever beat?

Her mourning was at once a protest and a haughty revolt. For my grandmother was first and foremost haughty. She scorned bright colours just as she had scorned being pretty or smiling. All the gracious ways of life she looked upon as the mark of the middle-class, for I must not forget the double heredity that animated her and united in her along with the well-bred pride of the aristocracy, the coarser pride of the

bourgeoisie. She was Duchesse de Merville, but *née* Odoacre . . . and she never forgot it. The old provincial family, rather the worse for wear, from which she was descended, and which had given to royalty side-whiskered ministers more conservative than the rulers themselves, caused her to insist on her social position with suspicious emphasis. Unlike the other ladies of our family, to whom high birth was a matter of course, she seemed to be the steward of her own rank, and this imparted to her an air which made her different from everyone else.

Nor was her scarce-hidden meanness wholly derived from our side of the house. Everlastingly supported by her elderly maid Peronne, whom she at times called Peronille, she really appeared to find pleasure in economies, the meanness of which nothing could conceal.

For instance, every time she travelled to the town fifteen miles off, she refused to have the motor car or the carriage. She rarely allowed herself to be driven in the victoria to the station where she took the train with Peronne, who was bound never to leave her side, and whose innocent face at times held a look of martyrdom.

But that was nothing: she systematically bought two second-class tickets for herself and maid, and then deliberately got into a first-class compartment. The station-master, the ticket-inspectors had ventured to object, but had been obliged to give way before the obstinacy with which she repeated her manœuvre, feeling ashamed to force her to pay the few centimes of supplementary fare which appeared to her to be so pleasant a gain.

She took infinite pleasure in winning little triumphs of that sort, in taking advantage of her rank to carry out similar ideas. And no doubt that was why, in all matters relating to money or servants, she gave proof of a superiority of which she was very proud. Her contests with Ginel, her steward, were indescribably funny, and at times distracted me from ironical thoughts in an astonishing way.

The worthy man, a rascal with all his air of honesty, and so familiar with the smallest detail of our family life that she and he would spend hours, at times, in discussing them, had got into the habit of inserting in his monthly bills fictitious purchases which he introduced with a scribble that meant: *Will go through*. My grandmother's short sight, which she would never own to, for she always refused to use glasses and only rarely had recourse to a reading-glass, allowed him to carry on these tricks, and smart Ginel was paid at least two to three hundred francs a month more than was due to him. But at the end of the year, when he brought in his books, he was astounded to find his mistress had deducted from his wages the total amount of the sums out of which he had swindled her, together with interest thereon, just as if it had been a loan, and this with a smile of triumph and nothing more: not a word said . . . That was a characteristic trait of the slyness which was so marked a feature of her character.

I might go on endlessly giving other examples. Apart from her miserliness, the two outstanding features of her character were her piety and what might be called her love for her son, my father. Let me tell you of these in turn. Her piety was strange.

I have never known so much fanaticism and so little mysticism, so much certainty and so little ecstasy. There was something in my grandmother's faith that terrified me, yet which I always seem to have envied.

And indeed, whether in my childhood or in the time immediately afterwards, when I believed, or when I was in despair because I did not believe, whatever had reference to God filled me with a dread, an anguish, an anxiety that I cannot express. Nay, more, ever since the day when all the religious fervour due to my hereditary tendencies and the teaching in my childhood was swept away in the breaking of my heart, bearing away most of my reasons for remaining in life, ever since then the very name of God has become to me like that of a woman, faithless or dead, whom I cannot bear to think of.

When I was a child, it was always with fervour that I entered a church—now it is in despair, as if I were entering a tomb. In a word, although an unbeliever, an atheist, and absolutely sure that there is naught which can make us survive, I have remained a mystic.

Always the sound of the church bells, the more stirring because they awake in us only the beliefs of our childhood, the opening of the holy doors to allow the faithful to enter, the atmosphere of the churches, impregnated with incense and prayer, the very uplifting of the Host which once was to me a truth and is now but a symbol, fill me with a sacred and dolorous emotion almost divine. Seared as I am with unbelief, I could weep when the great golden cross, so radiant to dying eyes, shows to the idolatrous crowd what is not—and what ought to have been.

So I could not but be amazed at and jealous of my

grandmother's placid faith, stripped of all such artifices, a faith so little impressed by the atmosphere of the church, that she could actually ask the notary's wife news of her husband's health while offering her holy water, and listen to the recital of the latest local scandals while she told her beads.

To her, neither God, death, nor any of the mighty things were in any way afar off. The future life was merely a house one entered, where those who had gone before were quietly waiting for you, seated round a family table. So what was the use of emotion, worry, anguish, grief? God was there. And the Duchesse de Merville was so sure of it, she was so accustomed to Him, knew Him so intimately, that she could comfortably carry on her talk with Peronne about household matters sitting at the feet of her familiar Divinity.

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I envy you, grandmother, I envy you, in spite of your hard face, your hard eyes, your halo of grey hair and your redoubtable black dress. You have never suffered, no matter how many of yours have died, no matter in what shroud you wrapped your dead husband, your dead son, no matter what gravestone separates you from them, no matter what ostentatious mourning you may have worn for them. You will pass away peacefully even in the midst of acute suffering, since you have never caught sight of the void, and you are certain you will not go to hell.

No, you did not suffer when you were told: "He whom you loved is dead": when you saw his livid face, the silent lips, the pallid ears, and the stony rigidity spreading over the once supple body; when

he became like the statues which ephemeral mortals model of themselves ere they vanish ; you did not suffer. You were able to look calmly upon all the horrors, to breathe the odour from the coffin, to sleep in the next room : the word " dead " meant nothing at all to you. You did not suffer, because he who was gone was merely a traveller you would come across again in some other town . . . You did not suffer—but perhaps you never loved ?

It may be you never loved, you who were so sure of yourself, so self-possessed, so materially convinced, in spite of the taste of dust and ashes in your mouth.

To those who share your belief, death is no longer death, love is no longer love, pity ceases to be pity. For them Love cannot have that brutal, terrible desire, that torturing need to snatch from the passing moment that which can never return. Those who possess Eternity possess Time.

Nor can pity have that same desire either, that torturing desire to snatch from suffering that which has so little time to know joy. You have time . . . you have time ! . . .

V

September 4.

I wish now to speak of her love for my father, which, I believe, was true and sincere, and assuredly one of the mainsprings of her life.

I have mentioned that she had four children. I shall tell later of my two aunts, Mme. d'Estissac and Mme. de Myre, whom she understood, with whom she got on, but whom she never loved and who were, the one, Mme. de Myre, a poor copy of herself, and the other, Mme. d'Estissac, a noisy, inconsequent creature, whom strangers, perhaps, might like.

Then there were the two sons: my uncle, whom I have sketched, and my father.

Her love for my father, which had, I fancy, not been particularly marked during his childhood, burst like a belated thunderstorm on the death of my grandfather and developed still more violently when the Duke married.

My grandmother loved to rule. Any place in which she could not be mistress was insipid to her, and direct authority was much more to her taste than honorary rule. She would certainly have preferred to be prime minister rather than crowned king in a limited monarchy. She liked to have charge of the keys, the accounts, the money. She would certainly have liked to be with my uncle, for then her rule would

have been over the real seat of the family where she had so long reigned ; but the young Duchesse would have none of it.

My uncle, almost immediately after his father's death, had married an English cousin of ours, Georgina Cosmo Creeves, daughter of the Marquis of Bedford, who, in spite of her exquisite " keepsake " beauty, had all the arrogant, imperialistic ways of her race.

Never could you have got it into the head of that clever creature—the only one of my aunts whom I liked, and that because of her beauty—that she was not to be mistress of her own home ; there, already the will of a short-tempered and capricious husband seemed enough to put up with ; what then was to be done with that stiff old lady in black constantly on the watch, and incessantly spreading round her an atmosphere of mistrust ? Infinitely gracious and firm, the young Duchesse gave my grandmother to understand that she did not intend to allow her to put on the airs of sovereign in a house where she no longer ruled ; made any permanent stay impossible, by changing rooms and so forth, and invited her four or five times a year to spend a brief week-end—which the dowager-Duchesse never did, preferring to go and rule elsewhere.

I think that notwithstanding the lack of soul in my grandmother, in spite of the peace which her religion secured to her, she went through a painful and pitiful time. A week before the Duc's death she had been the mistress in that house ; the day after she was nobody.

The tall mirrors between the panels, so used to her everlasting black dress, the garden, where she had held

sway even over the weeds, the fountains, whose jets flashed only by her order, all these things had ceased to be hers.

Another woman, of another nationality, of another generation, a woman who wore bright dresses and pearls, was now absolute mistress there. The lawns would be mowed to suit her ; the dead leaves, if she wished it, would float round the margin of the pond. There would even be swans among the sylvan shades of the park, and their hoarse and horrid cry would be repeated by the echoes that had once belonged to her.

I can imagine my grandmother's misery as she gazed out on that park which she could no longer call her own. She must have had, at that time, one of the few heart-pains that she could know . . . She pulled herself together . . . she departed.

Since she could no longer have complete control, very well, she would never set foot in the place again !

Thereupon she turned to my father, and her jealous affection, no longer to be shared with others, she bestowed unreservedly upon him. For he had a home to be ruled over, a hearth to be watched over. My mother was dead. My father lived alone, and albeit the Aigues-Mortes mansion, melancholy as it was, lying between the sea and the country, was not the family seat, it was nevertheless a realm in which she could impose her authority. She never left it again. Often, when my father went to Paris, and later during his last absence but one, she remained the only recognised owner, bending everyone and everything to her will, imposing service all round as though she were dosing them all with medicine.

At other times, through caprice, in a fit of the sulks,

or because my father had annoyed her, she would withdraw to her ground-floor flat in a mansion in Babylone Street, in the shady garden of which there was an oval pond with a stone rim . . . In this retreat she received a few of her intimate friends, very few of them intellectual, though those few had sufficed to gain for her a reputation of cleverness which she deserved in any case. For this severe old lady in black, to whom books meant so little, and who looked upon all writers as so much dirt, possessed a brilliant and biting wit. Never have I known anyone who could take a revenge, as she could, in one or two words, always finding the right expression when she criticised, and sometimes suggesting a whole world of impertinence in a single phrase.

Perhaps one of her most marked insolences was to misname people when their real names did not seem important enough to her to be remembered, a trick productive of the most vivid results.

I have said she loved my father, and she did in her own cold, dominating, resolute way, but she never gave the impression that she realised the fame to which he had attained, the prestige his extraordinary intellect had won for him. I can never believe that she appreciated the beauty of the symbols in which he clothed his ideas, his sparkling prose, at once so lyrical and so terse, so vigorous and precise that it might be compared to Nietzsche's. She perceived nothing of this.

She never knew the man of genius in him ; she knew only the practical man. She was not the least proud of the fact that Jacques de Merville had added undying lustre to the family name . . . What she wanted was that he should impose upon it the ideas for which she lived.

For my father—I am at last going to speak of him—was a wonderful being. No one shall prevent my saying so. As I go along, I shall depict his physical appearance. The part he has played in the progress of modern thought is so great and positive that it is not false pride which makes me recall it. If it were possible for my grandmother to spend her life near him without once becoming aware of the superior essence of his soul, and without appreciating the immense distance between him and one who possessed nothing more than his ideas, I, who am about to die because I could never share any of those thoughts of his, I am convinced that never for a second have I failed to discern the very essence of his genius.

For I did indeed admire him passionately; not for the truth of his utterances, but for the sacred beauty of his untruths . . .

With Nietzsche and Emerson, he is one of the three loftiest minds I have known; minds that, like all the summits of thought and of mountains, end in the purity of a snowy peak.

We were separated as by an abyss; at least, so I have believed, exaggerating it, no doubt . . . Attracted to him as to nothing else in the world, I have never had from him any counsel that would have helped me to live.

In a few days I shall, before I die, re-read that famous passage of his, entitled *The New Prayer on the Acropolis*, in which a whole generation found the mental nurture it needed, and from which thousands of youths drew a power of self-sacrifice, the pride that enabled them to give up everything for a duty voluntarily undertaken, for a glowing, unreasoning service of the ideal.

Reading it over for the last time I shall delight again in the innate charm of its sentences. Its periods shall harmoniously pass before me like heroic Muses, and I shall behold, in the heaven of his untroubled thought, those lightning flashes of genius that make of him a sort of happy Pascal. Everything, in that prose of his, shall fill me with wonder, right up to that closing sentence which reconstructs lost illusions, and which the men of my generation inscribed upon their hearts. But nothing in that doctrine will cause me to live . . .

O father mine, mighty, grave, and thoughtful brain, with your face revealing at once your genius and your intelligence, your features so imbued with life as you bend in laborious meditation, how is it that to me alone, among all the youths of my generation, you were not able to communicate your heroic gospel? You who imparted to a whole nation the faith which has sustained it, you who won so many disciples by the power of your intelligence, why could you not give to your son, who needed it more than any other, the smallest spark of your sacred fire?

While young hearts could cease to beat soothed by the rhythm of your phrases, while young men, repeating scraps of your august confession of faith, lying dying alone on the battle-field, with the terrible smell of blood in their nostrils, could be led by that august confession of faith to believe that their death and their life had a purpose, must I be the only one to repeat your words involuntarily as though they were a prayer in which I shall never succeed in believing?

VI

And you, my mother, how can I recall your image after these two imperious figures? A few lines of this book ought to suffice for your remembrance, you who fulfilled in a few brief years your inexplicable mission here below.

The only portrait of you that I know shows you as you were a year before my birth, that is one year before your death. You were a tall young girl in a ball-dress, light-hearted, but with a tragic face beneath your fair hair. Your tiny foot peeps out, shod in a silver shoe. Even did I not know who you were, I should know on looking at this portrait that you are no more, for what can they make of life, those whose eager features wear that fragile look, whose lips are so tremulous? Do they not always seize upon the first chance to die?

You vanished when I had scarcely drawn my first breath, but I fancy I can recall your smile above my cradle, hovering like a sail over a bark. That smile was there, in the air that surrounded me, in the glad sound of your voice. One day, all this faded away . . . without my knowing it . . . and thereafter no one spoke of you to me.

When I became curious enough to wonder about you, my father had already forgotten you. For fifteen years

you had been sleeping, your little hands folded, in a coffin lined with white satin, in that bright Italy whence you had come. He spoke of you to me as if you were a character, half-forgotten, in a novel, a Madeleine, a Mme. Renal, "who died after kissing her children."

What caused your death, mother mine? . . . Was it a cry of despair, or a cry of love that broke from you ere you left this world, young nymph of the grey robe and the silver-shod feet?

Did you suffer as you departed? Did your fingers, so soon relaxed, grip the sheets in an effort to retain your hold on life? Did you utter the terrified shriek of those who, having but a brief existence in the midst of eternity, are woe-smitten at losing it so young? Did you die of love or weariness, because of another being, or of your own accord, or, mayhap, of some stealthy illness that stole in through the half-opened door? . . .

However it may be, it is you who bestowed upon me that beauty of face of which I am so proud; you who tuned my heart to the love of beauty; you who passed on to me your golden hair, your tremulous glance, your pathetic, doomed charm; you remain more distant, in the shadowy past, because you never fulfilled your maternal task. You gave me life almost without knowing it, and forthwith you died, perchance to expiate what you had done. . .

"What is the use," sighs, from head to foot, your fair form in its vestment of tulle and silver, "of what use questionings, problems and mental toil? . . . No thought goes farther than a silver shoe slipping over a dark carpet.

"What was the good of Nietzsche's mighty darkened

heart? Of the height from which, for ten years, he beheld the world becoming unreadable? And what good was the old age of Goethe? . . . No more light is shed on his dying throes than on a virgin passing away . . .

“What is the use of the effort to live, of the wearisome return to work, of the obscure building-up, of the seed planted that will become a spreading chestnut-tree under which unknown generations shall sit on well-worn benches?

“What benefit is there in work completed, in our having been serious and strong? Perhaps the most important thing is to have a slender neck and to enjoy the passing hour, to feel, for a second, through all eternity, the aching marvel of being there . . . What is the good of it all? . . . What is the use? . . .”

Thus, O young girl who was my mother, do your eyes speak to me; you who will stand for ever at the dawn of my life the silver-shod nymph whose smile is a revelation of life and an invitation to death.

PART II

I

Was I born too early or too late? What
am I doing here below? (PAUL VERLAINE).

September 5.

The first of my definite remembrances is of a garden, and of my father in that garden.

The faces that are enshrined in the memories of childhood do not grow older. I shall always see my father as he was in that dim background of my life, shadowed and enlarged by remembrance.

He did not go out much when we were in the country, except to stroll in the park. He liked to wander about it after spending the day at work. Every evening, when lamps and stars are lit, he left his unfinished book and repaired to his daily rendezvous with the magic of twilight. Every evening he drew from the song of the nightingale in the broom, from the trailing mists on the ponds, from the limitless secret of night, something unfathomable and refreshing that fed his imagination.

All great minds love night. Goethe held it in veneration, in spite of his worship of the sun, and drew from it anew that essential force which bore him towards the light. The heart of Novalis, also, uprose to its persuasive evangel as smoke rises upwards ; and

I am sure that Blaise Pascal himself, his heart frozen in silence and terror, bore his troubled fervour to the natural good offices of the gloaming.

Searching in the depths of my memory, one of my earliest recollections is of a man with a thoughtful face walking in a garden flooded with moonlight, submissive to the influence of the stars as to that of a higher meditation.

Then this man would return to the house. The broad brow would bend over my head, as if at hazard, and the solitary dreamer of the garden would gather in his arms and kiss absent-mindedly the lonely child that I was. I remember his kisses; I have forgotten his tenderness. But he did love me; I scarcely ever remember his heart beating against mine, and yet he did weep once.

I do not recall his having ever held me close to himself, yet I am sure that I meant much to him. I am convinced that I was to him a kind of fragment of his thought boldly launched into the world-spaces. I was a part of himself which he had the right to cause to suffer; I was a portion of him, as were his great brow, illumined with pride, his eyes full of thought, his hands at once so reflective and so strong. Does one stop to think about one's eyes, one's steps, one's intellect? Well, I felt instinctively that I belonged to him, just as Mucius Scaevola's hand was Mucius Scaevola's who had the right to burn it.

So the days passed, died, began again, filled with my father's deep reveries and my grandmother's arbitrariness. Such was my childhood, eventless, devoid of brightness, the most restful period of my life; and it was especially during that time, when I knew nothing about such things, that the great work

of my father was being accomplished. For was it not within this garden, this house, that he brought forth the immense and enlightening series of books which astonished the world? How could he have given me everyday attentions, commonplace affection, this man who was ruling the world with his inspiration?

My father, the smiles, the gestures, the spiritual intercourse, the inexhaustible wealth of tenderness that sustains, the radiant comfortings of the intellect which you gave me not, you bestowed them upon the world. And, in truth, from whom would have come the ideas you sent forth to mankind which swept over human thought like serried battalions of clouds, if you had given up your time to listening to the whispers of my ingenuous infant-mind, if you had stopped to soothe my pain, if you had known the kind of soul you had bestowed upon me, if you had not feared to look boldly upon the work that I was, and for which you were responsible as you were for your other deeds?

Let us look at the Peerage, and turn up Merville: we shall see that, outside two or three of the names—of whom one was that Anne Julius, who in spite of five centuries of prejudices, paradoxically voted for the King's death—the only one who had shed any personal glory upon our house and enabled our family self-satisfaction to become justifiable pride, was my father.

In 1892, the year of my birth, he published his *Essay on the Human Will* which made him famous; in September, 1896, appeared his great work on *Heroes*, and in 1898 his *Life of Carlyle*. The whole intellectual world read his *Essay on a New Concept of the World*, which gave him a place, between

Nietzsche and Emerson, on a plane scarcely ever reached by human thought.

In 1910, that is, in the very year in which my state of despair seemed to become concentrated in one single night, he delivered at the Institut de France, where he was seated in the chair Renan had occupied, his great discourse on *The Power of Faith*. It was on the evening when I had ceased to believe in anything that he was uttering, before an enraptured audience, his gospel's Declaration of Faith.

Wondrous physician who cured the world, and could not save your own son !

The loneliness of my childhood is therefore not surprising. My father found his happiness in himself. Is it any wonder that he was farther from me than those sailors who set forth in search of a new world ? Or that I was like the sons of those sailors who grow accustomed to the long absences of their fathers, and know nothing of embraces except those that come as a break between two expeditions ?

Glory makes empty homes ; too high a mission expels everything else from the heart. The heart is crushed by the talons of the insatiate soul.

While these matters were being elaborated and an internal alchemy was preparing the crucible of my mind for its future experiences, I have reason to remember the room in which I slept and which opened into that of my governess.

Sometimes I would wake in the night, filled with inexpressible terror, a dread suspended between the real and the unreal.

I am obliged to write all this : the future was foretold in those warning signs as a disease is indicated by its symptoms. I do not seek to make this an excuse

for my later actions. I wish the world to have a simple and progressive explanation of the things which happened.

That sensation of my childhood, of a great abyss at the foot of my small bed, I experienced it again later when I began to understand myself, and nothing has ever been able to free my mind from the feeling that we live in a vast void.

It is strange, but the resultant sensation of metaphysical horror, of organic non-adaptation to life, of initial vertigo of thought, which I have not found accurately described in any work on medicine, which is barely suggested in certain pages of Tolstoi's *Confession*, is exactly similar to the horror I experienced as a child, as intense, as bitter, as vivid, with the same feeling of cold sweat and terror as that with which I would wake suddenly, in deepest darkness, and find myself plunged into a black void, in which I remained lost, as though waiting for a relief that could not come, until my English governess succeeded little by little in calming me and causing me to drop once more into the forgetfulness of sleep.

Another impression of my childhood, secret also, I recall. It is of a strain of music, unexpectedly heard, which coloured whatever surrounded me, the circumambient air, my thoughts, the landscape. My slightest movements were dictated by that rhythm, compelling, languorous, fantastic and monotonous. A part of my life is subject to this music which recurs, repeats, preludes and mingles with the anguish of which I have spoken, and is, in a way, a warning that it is disappearing. Terrible as is the first sensation of that anguish, overwhelming, overpowering, it seems in nowise to be connected with any of those nervous

phenomena which a Zurich specialist cures by psychoanalysis. It is usually followed by the second sensation, which, exquisite and inexplicable with its relaxing melody, is like a voice emerging from matter and myself, that envelops and soothes me as does reverie. Suddenly I hear it, and it seems to be distinct enough for me, were I a musician, to note it down; then abruptly it breaks like a rich bubble, rainbow-hued with harmony of sounds. It vanishes like some fluid and ironic sylph, leaving me alone in the presence of my void over which it seems to have floated with aerial raillery.

Apart from these two confusing sensations, intertwined with each other without their point of union being plain to me, my childhood passed peacefully. The need of love in me found no response anywhere. Yet I did not suffer. It was only later that I was to realise what I had missed in not having that column against which I should, as it were, have leant ere the signal for the start was given, what it had meant to be bereft of the invisible radiance with which the love of the silver-footed girl who was my mother would have filled me.

O non-existent Paradise where kindred souls meet once more! Mirage promised to mankind, if by any chance you exist somewhere, doubtless in you I shall taste that sweet delight which the world denied me in my tenderest years. If there be a survival of any sort for our fragmentary souls, the accomplice of my birth, the delicate murderess who brought me forth, remains for ever in eternity at the age at which I enter into it.

For she died at twenty-eight, unchanged, in full possession of that youthful beauty she had brought

from Italy as it were a jewel, and throughout eternity she and I will be of the same age. No generation shall come between us, like an impenetrable wall, to prevent the communion of our souls, and in those spheres which have sprung from my homesickness, we shall for ever love one another, we two who never knew each other.

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. . . A full-length portrait of her, hanging in an unoccupied room in our house, attracted me particularly. It is all that is left me of her.

For it was not till I was ten or twelve years old that I realised that she had once been in this life. Then, suddenly, owing perhaps to a chance remark by a servant, perhaps to a harsh comment from my grandmother, who never liked her and had always made unfavourable comparisons between her and her own two daughters—one of whom is ugly and the other a fool, so that a right balance is thus maintained—I realised that she had really lived once, and I began to dream of her as about some mysterious, broken doll one dares not mention . . .

The strange thing is that I never could bring myself to think of my mother as of the same generation as my grandmother, my father, or the other people I saw: she was not of their time, but of mine. She was my contemporary. And though she was dead, she seemed much closer to me than those who were still living . . .

How well I remember the morning I discovered her portrait. A great house in the midst of a garden is full of surprises. One day, opening a door, I found myself in a disused room, empty, sweet, as though it were dedicated to some religious, solemn, funereal purpose. Note that at this time death meant nothing to me. I

knew nothing whatever about it. So far I had not faced any problems. Life seemed to me to be made up of the park, of the gates, of my meditative father, of monotonous lawns, of a silent grandmother whose life ebbed away as she told her beads.

Nevertheless, that empty room affected me deeply. I stood there at the chance-opened door, as though I had no right to go in, as if I were indiscreetly penetrating the secret of a soul that had wished to remain mysterious, even at the cost of paying for it by dying.

Emotion and agitation need no explanation. They are like those poems whose greatest beauties cannot, happily, be commented upon by any professor, like some of Baudelaire's queer adjectives which we can never forget once we have met with them joined to certain words, the charm of which can never be made plain to those who do not feel it of themselves. Intelligence is everything, yet there is nothing beautiful save that which can be felt without its aid by an intuitive power of the soul that, maybe, is after all only a molecule of matter, but which, nevertheless, is unquestionably the most personal and marked fact in our incomplete universe. That empty room moved me as though it had been a poem the words of which conveyed to me no immediate meaning, but which touched in advance the understanding that would come later.

It moved me ; yet why should that surprise me ?

For was she not embedded, as it were, in those parts of me that came from her ? In my wide, thoughtful eyes, my slender yet strong neck, was not something of her vanished charm made permanent ? Was I not the sole depository of her who had lived in that room ?

Was I not an involuntary phantom of the vanished dweller coming back to recall its indeterminate absence?

I could not, therefore, be surprised that the child I was then should stop, a prey to emotion, on the threshold of that room of which no one had told me. I was, as it were, on the edge of a riddle which I felt, and which was of the soul, of that soul from which mine had drawn the light it needed to traverse the short distance from birth to death.

No one seemed to have touched anything in the room, or to have lived in it since she had impressed upon it her own personality so strongly that the smallest trifle in it would for ever bear witness to her vanished presence. There are people who seem to crystallise at the time of life at which their individuality becomes most marked, whether it be a time of pain or of joy. Why, then, should not the setting also belong to the dweller who for a time has made it her own? Time had vanished: the room was the chamber of her who was dead, and whose living counterfeit shone on the wall.

The outer air did not seem to reach it; an unconscious messenger, I was no doubt the first to bring to her the atmosphere of the years she had not known and would never know.

Round the portrait, which was her wounded heart made visible, the furniture of the room had an existence, fragile, and as if asleep, which imparted to the aspect of the place a charm at once fairylike and mournful.

In a small bookcase, made of slightly-scented wood, a few books, that seemed not to have been opened for

a long time, still bore on their thought-suggesting bindings the faint traces of the dead fingers.

There was a wonderful little Crebillon, bound in a green verging on turquoise, and which owed its place doubtless more to the rare charm of its binding than to the deadly monotonous vulgarity of the text. "The Fable of Orpheus," of Ange Polidorus, held within the tenuous arabesques of its covers all the prestige of a vanished age. A Leopardi, in white vellum, published at Rome in 1820, was the only thing that seemed to be a sorrowful symbol of its former owner. It was in that copy, in the pages my mother's fingers had turned, that I first read his hopeless words. It was there that I was first saddened by thy despairing lamentations, O black Swan of Recanati!

There were other books, other love-stories, other tales of despair on those shelves. There was a copy of *Le Rouge et le Noir*, in a romanticist binding of the time; a small Chenier, bound in a delightful shade, from between the covers of which the lines flew out like bee-crowned nymphs; an *Adolphe* in light morocco; three small volumes of Verlaine. What else? . . . I do not remember . . . And over and around the bookcase of rare wood brooded sensuality, morbidity and death.

On the writing-desk an inkstand, a leather writing-case, and in the case, on the leaves of blotting-paper, reversed words that seem permanent reflections in a dead blue mirror.

Scattered at haphazard, a number of trifles, doubtless those most prized by the vanished one. A great fan, like a dead bird, cast carelessly on the table, as if she had just forgotten it, an old scent bottle which still exhaled an odour of mingled plane and cypress, the

very scent of the Villa Ludovisi gardens ; and finally, in the centre, the tall portrait, the unforgettable portrait that appeared to look at no one, not even at me, but rather above and beyond, which appeared to gaze upon life with a challenging smile, that life which was dropping from her hand, carelessly, disdainfully, as had fallen the great pale fan.

I cannot express what that room became to me. From the day I discovered it in the house where I had always lived without suspecting its existence, I felt I had found something new in myself. It became at once my diversion and my desire, that silent room, which, while it imparted to me its own atmosphere, never revealed anything that was precise, since I was never, as with all that is exalted in life, to find out its real meaning.

Indeed, whether it was when my grandmother, noticing the grim pleasure which it gave me to linger there, forbade me to go back into that storehouse of memories, and so, by a key affixed to the sinister bunch that jingled at her belt beside her beads, deprived me, as it were, of my human fairy-tale by keeping me away from all that in my childish distress I loved, from the books so delightfully bound, the scent bottle with its rim of tiny pearls, the fan with its wounded bird, the little volume of Crebillon, lustrous as a gem, and lastly, from the portrait, silvery and inscrutable—whether it was then, or during talk, with my father, when my mother seemed but a shadow a phantom, the fact remains that I have never been able to solve the mystery of her death. I knew her not, and yet I felt her enchantment ; she was like the melody of a song played to me across the years, the words of which I have never found

Strange though it seems, this is true ; and now as I am about to die, I know not for what mysterious reason she who gave life to me, it may be gave herself to death.

I questioned my grandmother. She never answered me. She is so secretive that no entreaties can move her if she has determined to remain silent. I questioned my father, but from what he told me I only got the impression of a personality rendered vague by time, and quite unlike the heroine suggested to me by the atmosphere of my room, delicate yet pungent, so faint, yet with so strange a charm. None of the servants of her time are with us now. On my mother's side the family has died out ; a few cousins there yet may be, scattered abroad, or dead, in Italy.

She was the last of a race that vanished with her. She destroyed, if she killed herself, a whole generation. From that time forward, where could I make enquiries concerning her ? And why indeed should I do so ? . . . For that matter, her birth-name and her second one here, are inscribed upon a tombstone in dreamy Tuscany, her home. It may be that her life held no mystery at all, that frail life of hers, dim and secluded, probably futile—as are all our lives—an existence like that of a convolvulus or a cloud . . . Possibly my eagerness to discover something therein, to assume that it held a secret, is but one other symptom of my spiritual unrest. Perhaps, O reader of Leopardi, you are but a version of my soul !

No matter ! As such you please me ; to this, my conception of a mother, I cling ; I do not seek to exchange my ideal for a reality.

Even though my grandmother were to reply to my questions, or even if I knew where I could verify my

suspensions, I am sure that now I should never try to lift the veil. As a refuge from the realities of life, I desire to preserve this ideal that I have created ; this image that I have endowed with life in hours of spiritual homesickness and depression, shall remain an immortal pretext for happy dreams.

II

It was about this time, the time when I was forbidden to look at the portrait, that the soul within me, child as I was, awoke; a soul in touch and in sympathy with other souls. Not to possess it would have been better for me, for its extraordinary sensitiveness brought with it intense suffering to my father as to myself.

I was twelve years old, and there in the house where I was born, that portrait of me by Whistler (one of his very few successful child-portraits) looks calmly down upon the room where I shall sleep my last sleep.

Every day began regularly with lessons given to me by my English governess, Miss Light. Thanks to that sly wretch, the language clear as crystal in which the heart of Shelley sang became for me my second mother-tongue. Being a Protestant, she never spoke to me of religion; and, not wishing her to undertake this part of my religion, my grandmother herself heard me repeat my prayers every morning at her bedside.

Never can I forget that room to which Miss Light led me where, owing to attacks of neuralgia, my extraordinary grand-parent occasionally received me in bed. She made me kneel down at the foot of it, on the shining parquet floor, so scrupulously polished that it looked like a chestnut-coloured mirror; and

there against the hard wood of the bed, I prayed to God as if it were she herself who impersonated Him. To me such regular prayers were almost painful, kneeling there in that stuffy, unpleasant room, before a woman, aged, yet not old, who sat up in bed, checked me if I went too fast, harshly prompted me if ever I was at a loss for a word, and scolded me almost severely for my childish misuse of "consecrated" in place of "sanctified."

Lessons such as these, with their good marks, scoldings or punishments, so completely destroyed in me any religious fervour, that prayer-saying became a mere earthly duty. Had I been tempted to yield to the potential piety that filled my heart, to raise my eyes for one instant towards God, at once I should have had such tendency crushed on seeing that my only listener, instead of being the Heavenly King which childish imagination looks for and needs, was only an old lady in her grey bed-jacket, whose Book of the Mass lay beside her cookery-book, and whose austere face seemed to paralyse me from beneath its halo of a nightcap invariably set askew . . .

Such were my first communings with God!

. . . Fortunately for God and myself, my grandmother ere long considered that she could not effectively carry on my further religious education, and was kind enough, as the time for my first communion drew near, to hand it over to Father Mergelle, our parish priest, whom she called her *abbé*. She condescended, I say, to entrust me to that rustic, smiling priest, whom she treated as if he were one of her servants, who had married her and christened her, and who administered to her, as she scolded him from her bed, any number of sacraments.

For she partook of the Holy Communion nearly every day, and it was always celebrated by that same holy man, with his strong white hands, the hands of a peasant who had never done manual labour, and the gentle firmness of which made them indeed the hands of a pastor, if we take the word in its original meaning of shepherd. Even if she were crippled by those attacks of neuralgia, which meant painful hours for me at the foot of her bed, she would not hear of not receiving the Host daily. So she would send Peronne to the priest, who hurried back to her as being the most influential of his flock, and she promptly took the Communion without leaving her bed, exactly as if she were discharging a daily duty.

At least three or four times she insisted on having Extreme Unction, stripping that supreme sacrament, so tragic in its beauty and reserved for the most poignant moments in life, of the very meaning attached to the word "extreme." The truth is, she would not at any cost risk appearing before her Creator in a condition of soul not absolutely orthodox, and she therefore preferred to take advantage beforehand of this final consecration rather than run the slightest chance of leaving this world without it.

It was owing to this foresight on my grandmother's part—who, though certain that she would survive, and if hard in her attitude towards earthly life, yet clung to it to the point of surrounding herself with doctors as soon as she felt in the least degree unwell—that I was able to be present several times at this extraordinary spectacle. The sentences, inspired by the thought of "dust thou art, to dust shalt thou return," by that humility in which is concentrated our whole wretched condition of mortal man, the

lamentations in which eternal humanity bewails universal nothingness, were uttered by a priest on behalf of a dying penitent who snubbed him, was herself quite well, and who took upon herself to make the responses that are spoken by the server ; who stopped the priest when he went too fast, prompted him when he hesitated for a word, and scolded the God for whom he stood almost as sternly as she scolded her little grandson when he made a mistake in his morning prayers.

It was, then, to this domesticated priest that my grandmother thought fit to confide the improving of my religious knowledge, and from that time I ceased to be under her influence in this respect : all that I learned of God came to me through Father Mergelle. I have the dearest remembrances of this kindly man with the benevolent look. For the first time, perhaps, something that resembled affection did me good and strengthened my heart.

Miss Light used to take me to his house, and remained in the garden reading her Bible. I was not watched by anyone, nor scolded, in the cool shadow of the neighbouring church that cast upon Father Mergelle's home a limpid radiance of celestial peace.

There is no doubt that when he was with my grandmother, the Abbé Mergelle cut a sorry figure. He let her order him about too much, and when in the presence of his domineering parishioner he did not sufficiently maintain the divine authority which presumably was his. To him, indeed, my stern grandmother, whose aggressive piety exceeded that of all country parish priests, appeared as a female canon, ranking higher than he in the clerical hierarchy.

But he regained all his personal charm, the charm of a kindly village priest, when we were alone together at his room in the rectory, looking on to fields where sheep were feeding; a room filled with the fragrance of bough and blossom, and cool of aspect even in the most sultry summer days by reason of its shelves lined with countless books.

He feared my grandmother, and he loved me! Yes, he loved me; I am certain that he did. And now, as I write these words, the thought of his grief at my final decision for a moment unmans me. I am sure that he will not judge me harshly, for he is in close communion with his God, and full of compassion for his fellow-men. Yet, with a pang at my heart I seem to hear his voice, the voice that I love as a part of my past, and I can hear him say in the tone well-known to me, and with the same familiar gesture, "Why did he do that? Oh, why did he do that?"

Ah, simple-hearted priest of my old home, you will never know why I did it! How could you possibly understand? Happiness for you was such a simple matter that you found it at once in the restful cadence of a prayer or in a taper's gleam, as in the glory of those sunflowers in your rectory garden, tended by Benoite, the alert, beneath a sky alive with swallows' wings. For you my suicide will remain an enigma, something terrible, incomprehensible. As you chafe your furrowed brow, you will discover nothing, no motive, no reason, except (and of this I am sure) a reason to forgive me.

III

It was in that room, with its familiar view of the country-side, that the Abbé Mergelle taught me my catechism.

No days of my life were ever more restful than these. I felt safe in believing that which my heart was disposed to believe, and the Deity, as presented to me by the Abbé, a God at once remote and fairy-like, pleased me vastly. My faith, which dull religious doctrines could never rouse, was touched to enthusiasm by the eternal harmony of the gospel, and awoke to a perception of that God whose romantic and grievous story has kept such hold upon the souls of men.

At times when he wished to impress my boyish intelligence by a proof of what he told me, he would take me into the church. This he usually did after my evening lessons, on Mondays and Wednesdays, about the time of the Angelus, when a great serenity seemed to fall on the earth from the first bright stars.

In spite of his apparent simplicity, the Abbé Mergelle was, I daresay, well aware what effective aids to devotion are the dim light of a church and the scent of fading lilies on the altar. He knew what a peculiarly disturbing influence such things may have upon sensitive temperaments. That is why he took me to the church at seven o'clock, there to repeat my

last prayer before we parted for the night ; to his church that, empty though it was, seemed yet filled with devotional rapture, his beloved church that he knew so well, and which smiled upon him as the wide ocean smiles upon the mariner.

How much I owe to you, dear Abbé of my boyhood, obedient friend of my grandmother ! From you I learnt the faith that gave courage to my youth and a sweetness that can never be expressed, the faith that now, shattered as it is, and stripped of all its beautiful quality, yet lingers on as a legend, a poem, in this heart of mine.

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Then came the days of my religious education, the day of my first communion in that church I loved so well, and where my grandmother continued to discuss with Peronne her worldly interests ; that church which I always entered with a thrill of ecstasy.

I can still see my grandmother on the day of my first communion, seated stiff and gloomy in her usual place on the first row of chairs at the prie-Dieu that bore her name. I recall, too, the feeling I had then, one of disenchantment, disillusion and deception, a sense in my heart as of sorrow unconfessed.

The days that had preceded that radiant April morn, as full of piety as the Song of Songs of childhood, the days in which my soul was as a Shulamite, were devoted by my grandmother and Father Mergelle to rehearsals of the sacred rite. At the afternoon service, before dusk, I was taught to receive an unconsecrated wafer from the hands of the priest lest on the great day, by involuntary choking, I should fail to partake of the sacred food with due reverence

So, two or three times, I received in advance that sacrament from which I expected so great a change, and by which the presence of God should become visible and tangible to me. I went through those rehearsals without faith or exaltation, reserving those sensations in their entirety for the wondrous morning on which the Host would indeed be the Very Body. As for these unconsecrated wafers, they were like kisses on loveless lips.

The solemn morning dawned, shimmering in sunshine. Alas, that my first great sadness should come to me from God! that I should that day have realised the bitter sadness that follows the attainment of the end. That evening, on returning from service, an overwhelming melancholy came over me at the thought that, during the moment so eagerly awaited, nothing had differed much from the times when I had taken in the empty church the harmless wafers from which God was just as much absent as from the wafer of that day.

IV

September 7.

Shortly afterwards my uncle died. He was my father's brother, and I have already described my first meeting with him on an October day in his park. I only saw him twice in the course of my life, once alive, and once when he was lifeless.

I remember that first introduction to the final mystery of death, just as I remember my first disappointment with regard to God, for it made its mark upon my being. It must have been during the autumn after my first communion, and thus dead leaves were always associated in my mind with my uncle.

The news came one morning in a telegram while I was with my grandmother. She opened it, for it was addressed to her, paled very slightly, and hurried off to my father. I did not at first realise what the news meant, and, indeed, in my monotonous existence, with vague desires for movement and change, I was almost pleased by an event that could in any way perturb my imperturbable grandmother. Was she indeed a mother who had just learned of her son's death?

I stood there, excited and curious. On the table by the bed, lay the torn envelope looking like a secret disclosed. Miss Light came for me at once and took me to my father.

My grandmother, who never softened blows, had told him the news brusquely as he sat at his desk, which was covered with the papers and the books that spoke of his fame and enabled him to bear anything. And on that morning his desk seemed to me mightier and more unapproachable than ever. It looked to me like a stubborn rock, on which all the storms of life broke in vain. But on raising my eyes above the table, higher than the paper on which his hand had stopped writing, I was smitten by the feeling that the rock perhaps enclosed, as in a tomb, a heart . . .

. . . I see again that desk and that face as if I were re-living the moment, as if I had this minute entered the quiet room consecrated to mighty thought, to thought the world needed.

The desk was covered with papers showing my father's firm, individual writing. On it were three or four books that he always had by him: a *Marcus Aurelius*, bound in scarlet leather; a *Jean Jacques Rousseau*, and a small edition of *Corneille*. There was also something else, characteristic of him, that stood out like a gem: a Roman bust, a head of crystal on bronze, a fine, firm head, the forehead bound round with bands, in which I could recognise the features of one who had ruled his soul as sternly as he ruled his empire. That small adamantine emperor now seemed to rule over that working-desk.

My father told me his brother was dead, told me with unshaken voice and dry eyes. I understood that we were to go to his house, and that we must make haste. Miss Light received her instructions, for there was but one train, at noon, that could take us to our destination by evening.

It was late at night when we arrived, grandmother,

father and I, in the little village which I had seen but once, but which, for them, held a whole past filled with remembrances. I watched them, mother and son, as they sat in the darkened carriage, no doubt a prey to emotion, but too self-centred for the feeling to draw them together.

There was a conveyance waiting for us at the station, which took us to the house. I fancied I recognised, in the light of the crescent moon, the broad avenue where I had seen on that October day my uncle calling his dogs. Perhaps one of the moving shadows I could see was that of one of those dogs, escaped from the pack and gambolling in the dusk. But no, it was caused by the moonbeams, one of which, shining into the carriage, caused my father's broad, pale brow to look broader than ever.

My aunt was waiting for us in the ante-chamber. Her beauty seemed to defy night, silence and death. I was grateful to her for having remained so beautiful, for not allowing her grief to diminish her loveliness, but, on the contrary, to make her more sumptuously herself, as though she were a golden painting on a black background.

I, who have always worshipped beauty, in myself and in the universe, I was happy without knowing why, comforted inexpressibly as I looked at the splendid stranger who thus appeared to us on this threshold of mourning.

She at once took us up to the first floor of the silent house, where there seemed to be many servants, abruptly threw open a door and pointed to a bed in which a child slept, pale and thin, its little fists closed, its hair spread in glossy ringlets on the pillow. I

understood that she was showing us the living heir before showing us her dead husband.

Then she closed the door, passed along the corridor, and entered a larger room in which candles burned, and on the threshold of which we breathed an oppressive air of dust, silence and weariness. Here also someone slept so soundly that the other sleep, the sleep of the child, seemed but a poor imitation ; but the face of the dead man was so wilful, so drawn, so authoritative, that it seemed as though it was he who was asleep, the child who was dead.

At the sight of her son immobilised in that last attitude, my grandmother fell on her knees by the bedside. My father remained standing, but I caught the sound of a suppressed sob. Then they began to speak. They talked of the details of his death ; my aunt explained the sudden nature of his illness, and how fate smote so swiftly that one telegram told both of the illness and its ending. As she told the tragic details, her rich voice, beautiful as her features, suggested those flowers in Italian gardens that climb up slender, funereal cypresses.

She even seemed to impart life to the cold form on the bed, though there seemed no connection between it and her. Something distant and imperious in her seemed to protect her against everything. She was too intensely alive, her feet appeared too deeply-rooted in life, as though she were a glorious plant drawing sustenance from the very life-blood of nature, for the call of the dead among the dead to reach her, a living woman among the living.

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While they were talking, I looked at the figure that

lay there, this new dead man among the hosts of the dead, a fresh recruit enrolled in the pale army that hems us in on all sides. I looked at it indefatigably, attentively, inquisitively, as if in truth I sought to drag from it the secret it now knew, the secret shut in by its clenched teeth, like a bough of faded laurel it would never relinquish.

The long journey made in such haste, the day of wonder and expectation, the moonlit garden—they all amounted to this, to this motionless being lying in a strange chamber, who was the first dead creature I had beheld. My grandmother and my father had come here on an obligatory pilgrimage. They had come to see the broken bond between their past and their future. . . . I had come to see the first person I had lost. . . . It was Fate that had taken me there, so that, thanks to this revelation, on the threshold of life a white statue of the living should prove to me the universal nothingness.

Later on, no doubt, I reacted against this sensation, as a brook springs from a rock. Was not my nature intended to be joyous? At that moment, however, in presence of the destruction of personality, a feeling of despair took complete possession of me. It was a complex feeling, made up of wonder, of something much like amusement, and of infinite terror.

If I had not seen the being who lay there once before, seen him in a garden in autumn surrounded by his dogs, I could never have believed that he had once lived.

Those who, like myself at that instant, contemplate the ultimate end of man for the first time, who see the immobility, the evident iciness I would have liked to touch, cannot possibly believe that these man-shaped

forms were ever living beings like ourselves. It is impossible to believe that with our movements, our laughter, our excitements, our caprices, we shall become like that—annihilated.

My eyes roamed incessantly from the form stretched on the bed to the faces round me, to my father's face, pale in the light of the candles as if a part of the death-state of my brother had entered into him, to my grandmother's face, to the unchangingly beautiful face of my aunt.

There were other people in the room I had not seen at first, who had all come to this melancholy meeting because of the passing away of one of them. My two aunts, de Myre and d'Estissac, who now rose to kiss my grandmother and who had the look of being profoundly bored ; a colourless cousin whom I did not know ; one of my uncles, M. de Myre, whose worn, yellow face suggested that of a high-class undertaker ; and there was a nun kneeling at the foot of the bed who seemed like a mourner of ancient times grieving on behalf of those to whom that unique event, the death of a human being, seemed to mean but a momentary break in their customary habits of life.

No one troubled about me. The first expressions of sorrow having been exchanged, the conversations had resumed their round. My father alone was silent ; my aunts were chattering, my grandmother was almost animated. For, of course, there were many things to see to, many details to settle, many conventional questions of precedence, of invitation, of procession, that seemed to me to have very little importance in the face of that nothingness, but on which my uncle de Myre gave his opinion as an expert, just as if the prestige of having been an ambassador in former days

conferred upon him the responsibilities of master of ceremonies of the dead.

I had thus leisure to gaze upon the corpse. Compared with the living, it seemed to me greatly superior to them; in truth, Death has the power of drawing from human beings a grandeur which they do not appear to merit, but before which our hearts bow. What that supreme wizard had done for my uncle de Merville, would he be able to do it also for those who surrounded me, for these relatives whom he would eventually call to his flag?

In order that the dead may be transformed into those grandiose figures in whose presence we suffer a certain oppression, does Death have to discover in them something irreplaceable, or is that grandeur but his own asset, bound to figure wherever he appears? Would he succeed, in virtue of his own personal prestige, of his own icy authority, in turning into important dead the living who surrounded me, all of whom except my father were commonplace? Putting aside my grandmother, who went through life more like a spectre than a human being, would he be able to make anything of my two aunts? My uncle de Myre, of whom life had made no more than a wax doll, could death turn him into even a tolerable corpse?

The body of the man who lay stretched on his bed, and from which his relatives were already withdrawing in order to settle pompously the usual methods of getting rid of him, amazed and terrified me. Cut off from all human interests, a fettered prisoner from whom the others were preparing to depart, there was something in the still form that drew and held me. I could not take my eyes from it.

By to-morrow, or the day after at latest, the mystery of decomposition would reveal itself in the secrecy of the coffin, but already, in my childish imagination, continuous changes, like shadows on a pale canvas, were perceptible on the snow-white face.

The features of the dead undergo, like portraits of the living while they are being painted, successive alterations, in the course of which they resemble different members of their family, physically and morally

While I gazed upon that immobile face that seemed carved out of marble, I recognised a likeness to my grandmother, and also that peculiar look of those eyes sunk in their orbits which fascinated me in my father's face. Again as in a transparency I beheld the features of my grandfather whom I had seen only when I was a little child. These striking and familiar resemblances appeared one after another, as though all the various spirits of which the dead man was compounded were hovering over him and sought to transform him at the moment of his disappearance into a synopsis of his whole race.

The sensation I experienced in the presence of this unaccustomed sight, which disconcerted my soul as an unlettered mind would be disconcerted on which were pressed the most poignant passages of Æschylus—those, for instance, in the lost tragedy of *The Sphinx*, of which I have so often dreamed, and in which his Promethean genius frankly faced the torturing problem of death—that sensation was in truth a compound of terror and amazement. There was also in it a wondering admiration for which I could not clearly account.

Yet what more wretched object than a dead body ?

Separated from those who surrounded him, whose lives flowed on in all their mediocrity, subject to the decisions of other people, a pallid burden about to be cast out of its own house, a father, cold and stark, whose unknowing son sleeps the sleep of innocence in the halo of its fair hair, an infinite pity seemed to draw me towards him whom I did not know, who, when alive, had appeared to be so far away from me as he stood in his garden that autumn day surrounded by his dogs.

And now it was wonder that I experienced, as if, indeed, the only deities of which we can conceive and which we can love, the only deities sufficiently above us to fill us at once with respect and awe, were the dead, those deities of a day, crowned with the shining halo of a moment, divine occupants of a paradise that does not exist.

The flickering gleam of the candle on his brow, the grey pallor of his whole face, the deep hollow of the eyes, familiar through my having noted it so often elsewhere, the strange pattern of the veins at a part of the temples so essential that it seemed as though life had its seat there, the hands crossed humbly yet derisively in view of the mute pride in the features, all these things turned that corpse into a being far above us by reason of the greatness of its disassociation with Life. It seemed mighty and genial to me; unique also, as if Death were not permitted and promised to all of us, as if every dead being reinvented in its turn this personal masterpiece

My relatives by this time had gone: my grandmother, my three aunts and my detestable uncle de Myre, himself more funereal than the setting in which he moved. They were chatting in the next

room, planning the next day's arrangements, and those of the day after, like masters of the ceremonies at this ghastly and complicated function

We were only four now in the silence and darkness : my dead uncle, his hands crossed upon his shroud, my father who had drawn nearer and nearer, I, and the nun prone at the foot of the bed, wrapped in her flowing uniform and absorbed in prayer.

The atmosphere of the room, the flowers brought to him from his garden for the last time, the breath of freshness that seems to circulate round dead bodies, all these things abruptly reminded me of the church to which Father Margelle used to take me in the twilight, the church in which one was protected against the outer world and on the threshold of which one seemed to lay down one's every-day life to resume it only as one came out—the church in which God had so fearfully deceived me, where, in the Host filled with His Presence, He had seemed to me to be as much absent as He was in the unconsecrated wafers. And I knelt at the foot of the bed as I was wont to kneel at the foot of my grandmother's with an enthusiasm and fervour that I could not understand.

Of all human things, death alone did not seem to me to fall short of what was said of it. Appalling yet infinite, it appeared to me to be the only sensation left to the living which did not entail a sense of disappointment. My uncle certainly did not look disappointed. Of all the contradictory expressions that seemed to flit across that face of his, not one was marked by that feeling which all earthly efforts inspire. At any rate, this was an experience which did not promise more than it could fulfil, since my uncle's whole appearance exhibited a sort of terrible satisfaction, as if he had

just reached the only harbour which Fate grants to mankind.

The nun was still praying. The door through which my relatives had gone was closed. My father had drawn nearer to the bed. Now he was close to me. I looked up at him, at his features which now showed signs of emotion. He seemed to have awaited that particular moment when the others had gone, and when there would be no spectators. Now, before the nun busy at her prayer-mill, before the child whose thoughts were a mystery to him, he was about to let himself go, to yield to his long-repressed sorrow.

I saw him kneel down at the foot of the bed and stretch out his hand to that other hand rigid in death. He began to speak, as if delirious, muttering words broken by sobs. Then he clasped me to him. It was to the dead he was speaking, to that lifeless brother who never again would reply, to the man who lay there and who never again would hold intercourse with any other man.

I had always looked on my father as being above humanity almost, and on my grandmother as inhumanly earthly; my father had always seemed to me to be one for whom his own work constituted the entire universe, the work for which he lived. This was the first time and one of the few precious occasions when I forgot his great soul and caught a glimpse of his tender heart

There lay the brother whom he had not perhaps loved as he ought to have loved. The familiar opponent who had been a part of his childhood lay there, dead. And he began to moan. He was questioning him now, going back into the past to try and clear up misunderstandings, endeavouring to

have, with that dead body, the great explanation which one cannot get from the living.

Does existence, then, speed so swiftly that it is only by the side of death-beds that men have time to unravel the tangled skein which ought to be unknotted during life?

"Andrew," said my father, "you remember I loved you when we were boys; we used to walk in the garden together, side by side . . . Were we really angry with each other? You are my brother—have I lost you entirely?"

. . . And thus the eternal human drama repeated itself—the inability of people who are related to understand each other, and who do not try to do so till it is too late.

V

September 8,

One year after my uncle's death, in February 1906, I was privileged to see my father in the splendour of his fame, celebrating, as it were, a solemn service in honour of his mind. I have related the flash that revealed to me that he also had deep feelings. I have told how, by that deathbed, I had for a moment felt him close to me in a communion of despair.

We went to Paris to spend the winter, forsaking Father Margelle, the limpid realm of his church and the uninteresting lessons of Miss Light. I entered the Jesuit College in Madrid Street, with its old grey, silent house that it makes me sad to recall, for it seems to me as if there I lost one of my selves.

The head of the College at that time was Father Horn. It was during this period of my education by the Society of Jesus—I was fourteen—that I was a witness of the unforgettable ceremony in which it seemed to me I made the acquaintance of my father as men knew him, repeating to a certain extent the sensation of knowing him I had the night after my uncle's death.

He had recently been elected a member of the French Académie, to the chair formerly occupied by the great Renan, whose fog of incredulity my father's heroic faith was to dispel. On the occasion of the

address he was to deliver, my grandmother, who held, as a rule, that children ought not to be permitted the intimacy of great men and took infinite pains to keep me out of my father's life, nevertheless consented to allow me to miss my daily visit to Madrid Street and took me to this memorable meeting which was to exercise so great an influence on my life.

My father's expected address had aroused the greatest interest in intellectual circles. Of course he would have to refer to his predecessor, an unimportant playwright much applauded at the Comédie Française, and who had gained a reputation that was honourable and bound to be forgotten, and whose very success revealed the more emphatically his absolute nullity. But the personality of that Mr. George Launois—I think that was his name—was so unimportant, so overshadowed and suppressed, as it were, by the fame of Renan and of my father, that one might truly say the latter was the successor not of Launois, but of the poet who wrote the *Life of Jesus*, the *Gospel according to Saint Thomas*.

Every one hoped, every one knew that my father, over the head of the already forgotten playwright, would speak of the immortal thinker, and thus the audience would be in touch with those two minds, equally great but so opposed to each other, and follow a duel between universal scepticism and the most uncompromising faith. This combination of my father and Renan had drawn everyone to the famous hemicycle, and thus my first visit to the French Académie was a memorable meeting for many more than myself.

Grandmother took me there herself. Father had started ahead with Princesse Olkonsky, who had called

for him. She was his friend, one of the distractions of his life, a friend who never ceased pretending that she greatly influenced his thoughts.

I feel as if I were again breathing the cold air in the old paved street where our horses stopped, the damp atmosphere of the corridor; then came the sudden entrance into the hemicycle which was filled with strangers, chiefly men, and almost all of them old. My first impression was one of old age, as if neither mind nor thought could exist without it, although it seemed to me that the reverse was the case.

That day my grandmother was colder and stiffer than ever, proud, indeed, that her son was so famous a man, but taking the utmost care to conceal the fact. I caught sight almost at once of my aunts, seated pretty far from us, and with but one of the husbands present, the inevitable de Myre, looking as if he were husband enough for the pair of them. My aunts always turned up that way on great occasions, like sinister winter marmots, when, clothed in ceremonial garments, they appeared strangely at ease in any function at which it was a solemn duty to appear. They exchanged with my grandmother rapid signs of intelligence, while my uncle de Myre's face appeared vaguer than ever in the trying light from above. His moustache that day looked peculiarly fair, which aggravated his look of funereal frivolity.

At each official event in life the same faces reappear persistently, "like those faces one sees only when a riot breaks out," said Chamfort; those that are not seen are those of the people who have died. In that hall, lighted from above, in the multitude drawn together by the prospect of hearing my father's address, there were already most of the faces I was to see in

the noteworthy events in my life, at balls and at burials—dancers one evening, mourners next day.

Near the empty seat my father would presently occupy, and which for the time was but a void round which people waited, Princesse Olkonsky had just appeared wearing an amazing head-dress which looked like the cocked hat of an Académicien who was a Turk, a deliberately sensational hat that no milliner would consent to make, and which she must have turned out herself that morning with the help of her maid, Rebecca.

As she drew up her dress, very short even for that period, I caught sight of the horrified look of the Archbishop of Amiens, Monsignor du Vagavel, who was seating himself, but a neighbour on his right bent towards him to reassure His Eminence by telling him in a whisper who the lady was. Born an Olkonsky, she was the daughter of a Bosphorus ambassador and of a cousin of Homère, and grand-daughter, I was told, of a Russian revolutionist. For six years she had borne the most thoroughly French name, having been Countess de Maulnes during that time, for she had surprised into marriage a cousin of ours whom she had terrified from the first, and who had later divorced her. After that divorce she had resumed her maiden name, helping it out with one of those inoffensive princely titles which the easy-going East allows all more or less genuine descendants of old reigning families to adopt.

My people did not like her, my grandmother especially, for to her divorce and sleeping-cars were equally inventions of the devil, but my father appreciated her intellectual powers, which were fairly amazing, and even more revolutionary than her hats. Above all, he liked her genius, as I must call it, for

there is no other word to fit the gift the gods had bestowed upon her and which was assuredly not talent.

She had chosen music as the vehicle of expression, as some one else might have chosen poetry, and having come, like Chenier, from the East, she had brought back with her from those far-off isles, from the Bosphorus she had seen when she was seven, so new, captivating and delightful a sense of melody that our French technique, on which she had grafted it, appeared renewed by it.

Without troubling about complications, she had spontaneously poured out her soul in harmonies, and had thus composed works of art that belonged to all times and to none, that was the music of the past, just as it was also the music of the future. Undoubtedly some musicians of to-day, Dukas or Stravinski, for instance, have drawn from musical technique more far-reaching results by which some inspired genius of the future may perchance profit, but unquestionably this stranger-woman possessed a most exceptional temperament. Yet whenever I was with her, she disappointed and disconcerted me. I looked for some exalted Diana, a modern counterpart of Sappho, a sort of musical relation of René Vivien, and I saw only a small, excited, nervous person, restlessly moving her hands, who destroyed by some pun all the dreams she had aroused in me.

I have the right to say this, for times without number have I been intoxicated by her music, which made one think of a savage Chopin. Listening to her inhuman night-bird song in Italy, in the gardens of the Villa Albania where the moonbeams smote us through foliage greener than emeralds, I have drunk

so deep of that personal symphony of hers in which she put so much of youth, of death and of love that it seemed as though, henceforth, death, love and youth were her own.

So every time I have seen her, every time I have heard her shrill voice piercing the air, that agonising magpie voice of her, every time even that I have laughed at the vulgar stories with which she would set a whole company of ministers laughing and by which she gained a false reputation as a brilliant talker, every time I have seen her dazzle Mr. Vertuchot, who dotes on gardening, and Mme. Barchilde, who dotes on duchesses, pouring out on them her potful of compliment—I have never dared to open, when I got home, the music she had given me. I dreaded seeing her aggressive image intervene between my dreams and hers ; I dreaded lest the wondrous chords should clash like the flash of the imitation jewellery she wears ; I dreaded sensing in the divine swing of her compositions the carelessness of her dress, that, in a word, the genius I worship should stand revealed to me as a mere local improvisation, or a fakir's trick.

On this particular day she sat in the very front row, breathing in the glory she delights in, for play a part she must. For is not she, who ought to be nothing but living melody, the confidante of ministers and the muse of generals ?

Another and unexpected presence, however, soothed me ; a few seats from us, near a dark young man whom I did not know, the Duchesse de Merville smiled at us through her crape veil. Her lovely face was as radiant in the harsh crudity of daylight as it had appeared to me in the glimmer of the candles.

The hall was filling up. The audience was a somewhat unusual one, composed chiefly of society people, with even an actress, which startled my grandmother, but who could not take her eyes off her, and gazed at her with a look of mingled disgust and admiration.

Close to her was the Countess of Erfuhle, slight as a dragon-fly of black lace. Another face drew me : a couple of seats from Princesse Olkonsky, as close to the académiciens as he could get, I perceived a courtier—a frankly despised one—of my father's. He was Julius Nulpart, literary man, lecturer, minister even at odd times, and his great ambition was to be elected to the Académie. I forget who it was—possibly Hedda Olkonsky, always quick to perceive unexpected resemblances—that told me one day that he looked like a meal-worm. Ought it not to have been a bookworm? For this man's most constant occupation was to burrow in the works of others in the effort to build up a reputation for himself. The important positions he has so often occupied have failed to cure him of that bad habit of poking his nose everywhere and stirring up the dust of remembrances, reminding one of those insects who lay their eggs in dead bodies. . . . Suddenly, my father appeared !

A wave of emotion swept over me at seeing him in the midst of the assemblage, different, it seemed to me, from what he was when he left me an hour before. He was pale ; it was clear that he was moved.

His dear face upset me. In the midst of these strangers he seemed the nobler because of the contrast made of his being near such a man as Joseph Nulpart, and my heart began to beat violently, so violently indeed that I had to press my hand to it as though it were wounding me.

"What is the matter with you?" said my grandmother.

Nothing excited her, and she could not understand why I should be agitated. Her calmness had the effect of steadying me, and I tried to turn my mind to the trifling incidents in my life in order to throw off my emotion.

Silence, due to respect and admiration, to curiosity, too, had greeted my father, but deeper still was the silence in my heart. Let those who did not understand and who strove to destroy our affection carry their minds back to that moment. I am sure that the ordinary sons of ordinary fathers have never experienced the thrill, the physical pain his dear face gave me that day.

True, there did not exist between us that close intimacy that binds other fathers to other sons; our conversations were no more than scraps of the serious talk we ought to have had some day and that now we shall never have; we have never told each other the essential things we had to say to each other, but nevertheless there must have existed between us a deep and extraordinary bond, since on that day the sight of his face, just his face, had on me so powerful an effect. There was something between us that was hidden, something painful and pathetic that resembled some moral passion, and without which we should never have inflicted on each other so much suffering.

For a short time while the applause rose round him like flocks of insistent doves, my father remained standing; then he sat down and prepared to speak. . .

It may be that as his glance swept over the audience, he was trying to draw strength from the sacred aid of a beloved face. Would he had then turned on me his

big eyes full of thought, for I feel that he must then have seen all the secret love of my heart. But his glance met that of Princesse Olkonsky. Later, it may be, he also sought my eyes, and failed to find them.

He began his address. . . A thrill ran through the hall. His eloquence was unquestionably masterful, supernatural, exalting. It seemed as if a living soul, born of the nobility of all other souls, was throbbing in the air. His own colleagues gazed upon him, marvelling and rapt. I can still see them. Most of them are dead now, and the remembrance of that memorable meeting which sums up all others has ghosts on many a chair, even on that on which my father had been seated.

I have never revisited that solemn hall, and I shall never set foot in it again. What could give me back the dear personality which so upset me that day? That vast hall would be to me nothing but a tomb out of which would rise the echo of a voice. I can still see, pale under his white hair, the brow of Gaston Paris, who represented, as it were, all the legendary Middle Ages to which he had imparted modern life. I still see Pierre Loti, divine pilgrim to far-off cities, so skilful in playing on his traveller's viol the sonata of Nothingness. By his side I see Paul Hervieu, whose clean glance shed so direct a ray on the world that the nobility of life diminished when that glance became extinct. I can see the explorer of souls and countries who was going to welcome my father.

But my father had begun to speak and I was listening to him. . . .

After a brief review of the works of his predecessor, whom every one present was silently begging him to

forget, he turned, as was expected, to Renan. I know nothing finer in my father's work than the portion of his address in which he recalled the great man's childhood ; by an amazing power of imagination, he caused to live before us the captivating Brittany he had never seen and where the childhood of Henriette Renan's brother was spent. When he described the sunsets at Tréguier, he spoke as a poet rather than as a philosopher, and a breath of sweetness and romance swept over that assembly of elders. You could almost hear the sound of the bells of Ys.

Then he spoke of Noémi, and as there was present another Noémi who bore Renan's name, he silently turned towards her. Then he spoke of Henriette, and in describing her sisterly love, he found expressions so suave, so tender, that I could scarcely believe it was he who was talking, he whose heart I had in vain striven to gain.

Of course all this was but a prelude, the more poetic and striking that it was to contrast with the rest of the address.

For no one, naturally, could expect my father to approve of Renan's ideas. His whole trend of thought went in a diametrically opposite direction, to a belief in will, in energetic faith. His books constituted one long panegyric of faith, of a reconstruction, through faith, of the gods destroyed by civilisation. He believed that a new world could be born from human hope and self-discipline. He insisted on Duty, which appeared to him like a categorical, definitive, imperious command, a flaming archangel of the soul to which everything else had to be sacrificed. He believed in the usefulness of living in so intrinsic and absolute a fashion that God Himself seemed to him to be

unnecessary, and the survival of personality not indispensable to the enjoyment of existence. Men could suffice for themselves if they combined in a mighty general effort on which the future would depend.

Louis XV's remark: "After me the deluge" was not merely monstrous to him: it was absurd. "After me the Light!" he exclaimed. "I have made it, I shall behold it!"

Alas, it only shone on his tomb.

It will readily be understood, therefore, what deep antagonism Renan's ideas, which so powerfully attracted me, inspired in him. Nihilism angered and frightened him. And he had taken advantage of this exceptional occasion to proclaim openly the trend of his thought in answer to the man who had been the boldest advocate of doctrines of which he strongly disapproved.

After dwelling at length on the poet, after depicting the nostalgia in his works, he attacked his beliefs. He criticised Renan's attitude in his own masterly manner, and in the former's delectable yet anguish-filled void, he re-established the great entities in which he himself believed.

It is necessary to have heard his voice, to have seen his moved face, to have felt the magnetism that came from him, to be able to understand the effect he had on his audience. He electrified his hearers, filled them with Hope. He turned that assembly where in spite of all, mediocrity predominated, into a kind of fountain whence the future might issue. For an hour, by his images, metaphors and dazzling flashes of genius, he gave a wonderful lesson in Life and the courage to Live. It was harassing and beautiful, violent and magnificent. It seemed as if my father were charging

at every listener, and in a tourney of pure thought was trying to drive the spear of his own faith into their breasts.

Yet a great sadness took possession of me . . . In spite of the emotion of everyone in the hall, in spite of the tears that wetted the veil of the Princesse Olkonsky, in some confused way I felt that it was all false. My father was not telling the truth. He was working a miracle, and there are no human miracles.

Under the spell of his eloquence and the magnetism of his personality, for a moment the audience forgot itself. But that was because of the sublime trickery of his genius, in which he himself could not possibly believe.

As I listened to his magnificent peroration, I remembered his sorrowful watch at the foot of his brother's death-bed, his humble genuflexion which was so much more human . . . and I saw the fictitious nature of this extreme idealism, its artificiality.

My father, my father, you who abhorred falsehood, I swear you were lying!

VI

September 9.

Yonder is the Isle of Tombs, the Silent Isle ; yonder, too, are the graves of his youth. (NIETZSCHE.)

Spiritu di titano entre virginea forma. (CARDUCCI.)

Thus passed the most radiant period of my youth, the time when I really forgot, in my wonderful state of exaltation, all the fundamental despair in my soul ; when youth by the mere fact of its presence gave to my physical personality something of its own splendid ecstasy.

I have detailed the tortures that I suffered. I have related the aberration of my child-mind about death which was at the root of my susceptibility. I did not check it ; I did not accustom myself to notice it. There are precipices down which the most practised eye will not learn to look. But I forgot it momentarily. I laid it down at the entrance of that revel of my youth, unconsciously resolved to take it up again when the last notes of the violins had died away.

If only I still possessed the note-book which my father burned ! Every evening I wrote down in it my impressions when I came home from school after those days of work in which I found so little to interest me beyond personal questions that mastered me and which

kept becoming more and more insistent, and I systematically and proudly refused to learn whatever did not contribute to the education I had decided to acquire. Thus my whole life from fourteen to sixteen became gradually enclosed within that black note-book, just as to-day it throbs within these pages that I shall leave behind me when I disappear. I always liked to take notes of my life, just as I liked to survey myself in the cold reflection of mirrors, or in that of those other icy mirrors, the hearts of living beings.

I am well aware how futile and how hopeless are these attempts of mine to preserve an aspect of my being, and in a way to reproduce some reflection of it. Yet I have never been able to overcome the habit, and all my life long I have thus endeavoured painfully to preserve something that Time destroys.

One day my father came upon the black note-book in my desk, insecurely locked by its little silver key. Whether he found it himself or if it were brought to him by some one else, I have never ascertained. All I know is that on my return from school my grandmother told me that he wished to see me.

It was an exquisite autumn day ; one of those golden days of Saint Martin's summer which, on the threshold of winter, have all the delicate charm of those of spring. At that time, a light carriage called for me at the close of school-hours, and in this I used to drive home, braced and cheerful, in the breezy air. The moment I saw my father's expression I knew that he had read the contents of my note-book, filled with secrets and memories.

The knowledge was first and foremost a relief. My father, who so seldom talked to me, with whom I was so little intimate, at last knew me through and through.

All that interested my waking youth, all the troubles of my fifteenth year, my glorious and gradually intelligible disquiet, the secrets one tells to no one, had now become known to him. He to whom I had thus revealed everything unwittingly, without being even aware of it, had become my first thorough confidant.

Assuredly there were things in that black note-book of mine that I would rather he had not read : disquieting questions one had a right to keep to one's self. But what did that matter ? I was glad they had come to his knowledge, glad to feel myself standing nude before him, glad that any impurity in me was plain to him, he who was the supreme physician of the soul for which he was responsible.

But, alas ! my father appeared to be annoyed with me. A pained sadness overcast his beloved face ; he was a prey to the terror that one life experiences on discovering something unsuspected in another life.

Our talk was long, searching, and filled with reproaches. My father appeared bent on extirpating in me whatever was not his own self. How cruel he seemed to me that day ! But later I understood that, had the necessity arisen, he would have been just as severe with himself. Ready as he was to destroy his own delight, was he not justified in giving mine to the flames ? At that moment, as if he sought to annihilate this fragment of my past, he cast into the fire my little black-backed diary.

The leaves twisted, bent back as if alive, as if something of myself were in truth consuming in the flames. Then he drew me towards him, and clasped me close. Thus we remained for a long while.

Again I see the room, the lamp, the great armchair in which once more we were to be together at a still more solemn moment, in front of that consuming fire that was like some eternal golden phoenix rising from its own ashes.

The book vanished, and with it, my father thought, had gone that involuntary and secret foe that this manifestation of my youth was to him. He drew me still nearer to him, filled with pity at the tears that ran down my cheeks as I thought of the burned book, of the fragment of myself that had perished with it, and of those other youths who resembled me.

I shall not forget you, boyish records which my father destroyed in vain. I shall always remember you, college garden, quiet as the face of a sleeper, garden where, in the shadow of the little chapel, I first read Verlaine. Nor could I ever forget the sleepless nights of my fifteenth year, when within the youthful breast there awakens a sensitive heart, so eager for pleasure, so desperately full of joy.

I shall always remember your austere face, Father le Horn, and how during a sudden illness at school, you leant over me with your brown eyes full of such strange intentness, you, Father le Horn, who like Rance and Don Juan, became a priest in consequence of a passionate love-affair, you who it seems had known my mother as a girl in Tuscany when you were twenty years old.

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incurable poisons ; let your taste be the final test of all things. Love da Vinci and Shelley, Baudelaire and Mallarmé, Jules Laforgue's abject irony, Renan's immortal prose. Prefer to the masterpieces made commonplace by the crowd, to the temples infested by the faithful, the blessed altars before which so few are wont to kneel. Love to gallop at night along the lonely shore, with Byron's phantom steed close to your side. Let each of your days be an arch over which your minutes dance, an arch that spans the horizon.

"Learn the living taste of pleasures ; make every joy your own ; let every form of voluptuousness be known to you. Realise what all others have dreamed : Smindride, prone upon his bed of roses, craving perfect pleasure ; Alcibiades, when he set sail with his fleet ; all those, in short, who are pathetic and wondrous because of their quest for the happiness they have never found ! "

Yes, that imperishable statue, that double of myself, said to me :

"Find what they found, O you that are he for whom unconsciously life was waiting ! Have you ever thought of all that can be made out of life ? Have you thought that Sensation, an element of instant joy, is an inexhaustible treasure from which you can always hope to draw something new ?

"Become," quoth the imperishable statue, "in this paradise of your youth in which you are tempted and corrupted, what wretched Man and Woman would have become had they not hearkened to the external call of the serpent, had they not desired to know the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil ; become what they would have if, in their criminal nudity, in their

splendid nudity, they had plucked the fruit of the Tree of Life, the tree that was Science, which, had it given them its fruit, would have made them more powerful, more invulnerable than the gods themselves."

And the fair, imperishable statue murmured :

"For the tree of Life, the tree not mentioned, was there, radiant and accessible ! There it stood, but they saw it not.

"Men, as they bit into the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, learned naught else but to die, for Satan counselled them ill. . . . There grew, in the garden of Paradise, a marvellous tree, weightier in itself than a whole star of the heavens. Had men tasted of it, the universe would have been transformed.

"It is you who are to taste it and to know its woeful savour, for he that shall eat of the fruit of that tree shall be freed from good and from evil, from hope and love, and possess the priceless adventure of his own self.

"Be, among all this unsophisticated humanity, the one and only living man that feels not the burden of original sin !"

Thus, radiant and threatening, spoke to me the statue of my Youth, that statue which is but a ruin to-day, the mere spectre of itself.

And thus one day, a day soon to dawn, a voice was to speak to me—the voice of Stephane Savage.

VIII

Somehow or other I got through my B.A. examination, that first levelling of the intellect, that official summons to the barracks of the mind.

Almost immediately afterwards, my father, who had gone back to Aigues-Mortes, decided that I should travel. He wished to get me away for a time from Paris, where life seemed to him rather dangerous for a nature like mine, so extraordinarily weak, so highly impressionable, so ready to indulge in idleness.

It was then that I got to know Stephane Savage.

My father wished me to have a mentor of his own choosing, for the greatest intellects often make these absurd mistakes. To me, whom the irony of Life delights, this thought is diverting. I cannot help laughing when I recollect that it was my own father who selected Stephane Savage to be my tutor.

When I was fifteen, my grandmother was wont to lock the bookcase on the first floor, lest I should see a certain book which was not suited to my years. People are thus more strict about books, those inanimate tongues, than they are about human beings, which are living tongues.

Stephane Savage was assuredly not a book for children, nor for youth, nor, indeed, for grown-up people, and I have always wondered through what

involuntary complicity of fate I was given as tutor this exceptionally evil corrupter. I seem to recollect that my father, wishing me to have the companionship of a learned, serious man who, if necessary, might accompany me and control my life during that brief interval between leaving college and attaining my majority, wrote to a former tutor of his who had a school in the neighbourhood of Passy.

It was this M. de Mursay who, after mature reflection, sent us Stephane Savage, a teacher of philosophy at Mursay's, but whose ideas, even in the domain of metaphysics, were considered by the parents of his pupils extremely bewildering.

It is laughable to think that this worthy man, anxious to meet the wishes of my father, himself a most worthy man on a question of conduct, should have sent, quite unwittingly, the very man who was so absolutely unfitted to do what was required of him and who, indeed, was about to do the very opposite.

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Stephane Savage, a teacher of philosophy in a small school at Passy, that country suburb! Is it not enough to surprise, to disconcert one, to appear actually incredible? It seems impossible to understand it when one reflects on what the man became later, and on what was the intrinsic value of that mind of his, dazzling even in what it had of horrible. Just as much as my father's doctrines, it stands for one of the forms of world-thought, one of the attitudes of the soul confronted with the problem of life.

In an age such as ours, in which the meanest talent is at once turned into a source of gain, in which André Gide has but a few fascinated readers, in which writers

like Henri Bordeaux, for instance, are members of the French Académie, and represent, to millions of brains, our national intelligence, waiting, unconsciously it may be, for some Jules Lemaître who shall eventually gibbet them, how could such a great intellect, rich in unfathomable treasures, be permitted to moulder away between two shops in Passy, at one of those second-rate crammers where the louts of the new plutocracy are prepared in all haste to get a useless degree?

Bah! Rousseau was nobody until he was forty, and the divine Verlaine was a prisoner in some school or other where perhaps he was ill-treated by Fate, for the verses in which he speaks of it retain the imprisoned melody, the sigh breathed against the bars. Resolved to harm, Destiny had doubtless arranged, as in some amazing but unskilful plot, the meeting of the characters, the conversations, the unexpected situations.

All men go forward to meet their fate, and events, great and small, work together for our unhappiness, towards our death. Having determined to destroy one human being, Destiny does not hesitate to sacrifice three.

Had worthy M. de Mursay not sent Stephane Savage to us that day, perhaps I should have gone to the right instead of to the left on my road of life. If Stephane Savage had not been mouldering in suburban Passy, waiting, without hoping, for the sound of Fate's bell that should call him to me, he would not have been sent that day by M. de Mursay.

It had all been arranged like that. To the fulfilment of my soul-tragedy, this prologue of injustice was necessary—that at the age of thirty-six Stephane

Savage should be a sort of combined usher and school-master in that fusty school at Passy.

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"Fate chooses one of us as the material for a magnificent poem or to be ruthlessly sacrificed, as she did with *Œdipus* or *Medea*."

So spoke an Empress; so wailed Elizabeth of Austria, her heart prepared for the blow of Lucchini's poniard.

Fate also chooses human beings to work into and complete the personality of others. People who ought to be playing leading parts in the drama of their own lives are allotted third-rate parts, their actions and misfortunes serving chiefly to bring out the doings of others, as *Horatio*, *Polonius* and *Ophelia* are grouped round the Prince of Denmark chiefly to emphasise the meeting of the son and the father's ghost.

And it seems to me that my grandmother, my uncles, the people whom I have met in life, *Stephane Savage* himself, were placed round me by some Power that loved conflict of thought and rivalries of soul merely to make the setting for the meeting of my father and myself.

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Stephane Savage appeared. Being recommended by *M. de Mursay*, who had superintended my father's education, he was naturally made welcome: even that amazing grandmother of mine received him in the most charming manner, a manner that underwent a change later on, while my father had long talks with him, talks in which I was not invited to take part.

Savage's first duty was to accompany me on a trip to the Isles of Greece in uncle de Myre's yacht, and to round off, on the way, whatever might be fragmentary or vague in my studies.

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Though it may seem odious, it is none the less needful that when I speak of Stephane Savage, I should strive to rid myself of that intellectual domination of his which caused me to be blind to his real character. There is nothing more vile, more sacrilegious, than to destroy one's former idols, although this is sometimes a proof of courage. Often one is obliged to do so. This story would not be the story of my intellectual life if at every moment I were obliged to revert to the state of mind in which successive influences acted on me.

And in any case, what do I care for the opinion of others? I have never paid any attention to what people thought, and why should I change just when I am about to die?

I know what they will say: "You were the friend of that man, his disciple. You yielded to his influence, you admired him as a writer—you ought to preserve at least the respect of your former attitude towards him."

Such is not my view of the case. Criticism of ourselves, of God, of our parents, of our world, is at the basis of all real knowledge. I have tried to get a true estimate of myself, just as I have tried to form a clear conception of my father and of Stephane. The world may call me a renegade, but little do I care what the world calls me.

Nothing can be expected from those who burn down their former temples in order to construct new ones.

We must not believe in any illusions, enthusiasms or masterpieces accepted as such by others than ourself. We must not accept any of the opinions of those who have gone before us, and by the light of which it is sought to impose the future upon us. Every opinion is subject to revision, including our own; every love, even our own, must be analysed, and all the more glorious will it be if it emerges stronger from that process. Let us acclaim only those souls, those masterpieces, those religions and those philosophies into which we can delve without exhausting them.

To make matters plain, I must come back to myself, to myself, always to myself.

At the moment when Stephane Savage came into my life, I was still a child. I know well what will be urged against that statement, and that anyone on reading what so far I have written will find abundant proof to the contrary. It will be asserted that a being who, between the ages of twelve and sixteen, had the thoughts which these pages, written later, prove that I had, could not have been very much of a child, considering the way in which he was able to analyse not only his surroundings, but also himself. Besides, these ages were not written at those times in my life which they describe, but now, at the close of my life, and in painting this picture of my youth, I have dipped my brush in the tints of my present disenchantment.

However agitated, however corrupted through my reading and the influences round me my youthful years may have been, I was ingenuous. My very cynicism was radiant with perilous candour. There was, in

my arrogant exultation, an invincible and painful purity.

It is possible that at the time I met Stephane Savage I had gone far in acquiring sensations, had travelled a long way in my thoughts. But I was still a child, a child in my very impressionability, my changeableness, my inconsistent facility in yielding to emotion.

A child indeed. And I am not sure that I am not a child still, an older child, "whose waving hair has been stirred by every breeze of earth," as I said in those lines of mine which he liked so much, lines to a child in which I expressed the hopeless quests of my soul.

The portraits of me of that period, if one were to study them, would prove the truth of what I state. They represent a child of sixteen, although I was actually over eighteen. No one could have been more ready to yield to any influence that corresponded with his secret thoughts. No one could more enthusiastically look in the mirror offered him by an impudent hand and go into ecstasies over the masterpiece his image seemed to him.

What a prey I was, then, for Stephane Savage, a prey at once weak and interesting! What an instrument for his skilled hand! I was the weapon that he had been looking for with which to smite the world. . .

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At that time he was about thirty-eight years of age, and so far had not published anything. No one, indeed, suspected that he would one day be a writer.

The intuition which added to my natural intelligence a swift perspicuity, enabled me to guess at once that he was a man of importance. I foresaw that this

individual who was coming almost humbly into my life by a side-door was destined to play a considerable part in it. Those who knew him then would hardly have recognised him later. His humble duties at the college, the mortifications which his poverty entailed, and for which he hated everyone, made him seem another person. But he was, nevertheless, Stephane Savage, and a discerning onlooker might have recognised in him one of the most startling minds of the day.

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I said just now that I was the being he wished to find.

He understood it at once, recognised me in a second. He saw that he had, ready to his hand, that arrogant and unscrupulous hand of his, the very tool his ambition, his thirst for revenge, and his pleasure demanded. Let me explain these three things.

His ambition : rightly, for I was the son of a great man, a man who counted in the world. My father's position in society was important, for, apart from his intellectual rank, he was one of the notables among whom Stephane considered that it was his right and his duty to take his place.

His thirst for revenge : because from his childhood he had vegetated in obscure and humble circumstances, and he raged at a fate so little in conformity with his mind. What a sweet revenge it would be to make use of a youth to restore the balance and to attain all for which he had longed.

His pleasure : for, indeed, I was the very type Stephane Savage needed to satisfy that side of him.

To speak as no one had ever spoken before, even that brilliant talker, Hedda Olkonsky, to write a great book, to aspire to the satisfaction of any or every other ambition, nothing could so intensely please Stephane Savage as to impose himself upon a soul, to recreate it, so to speak, provided it possessed possibilities of producing something unexpected, something surprising.

I remember our talk in one of the last interviews I had with him before we finally separated. To recall it fills me with terror. My father was dead, and when Stephane mocked at my resolve to go and live far from Paris and accused me of lying to him, my anger rose, and I smilingly asked him how he knew I was not speaking the truth and by what right he affirmed it.

"By the right I have to read," he answered, "in the hearts I have formed."

"Are you my father or God, Stephane?" I asked.

"Neither the one nor the other," he replied, "fortunately for you, since, were I your father, I should be dead, and if I were your God, I would be non-existent."

"Then who are you, to speak to me as you do?" I exclaimed.

"I am your creator!"

And that is exactly what Stephane believed and took pride in. It seemed to him that he had invented my soul. He was mistaken, but it cannot be denied that he had implanted in it some of his paradoxes, and, desirous of making his influence prevail, of watching the mysterious moral penetration of his mind in that of another, no subject for his experiments could possibly seem to him so interesting as a youth of my age, rank and personal beauty.

I will not go so far as to say that Stephane's affection

for me was wholly interested, for it would not be true. But, nevertheless, I was primarily his tool, his splendid wonder-working tool, the ivory weapon with which he determined to smite the world, but he never ceased to acknowledge the precious quality of the weapon he employed to satisfy at once the worst and the noblest in his own nature.

He was a compound of a philosopher of antiquity and of a revolutionary, of a pagan and of a destroyer, and to the last his soul appeared to be a great paradox.

He was tall, about a head taller than my father, and very broad-shouldered ; his hand-clasp was slippery yet masterful. When I first saw him, his physical appearance impressed me unpleasantly, but his intellectual powers amazed and fascinated me wholly. Need I say that, seeing the kind of youth I was, it was easy to be fascinated by a man who brought the gospel of the kind of life I desired ?

That trip lives in my memory. We started from Marseilles, where my grandmother had brought me, taking advantage of her journey to pay a visit to an old cousin of hers, the Marquise de St. Dallièrre-St.-Georges, who never left her rooms, and devoted her days to half-a-dozen cats and to the composition of a collection of maxims, after the manner of La Rochefoucauld : severe towards men, merciful to animals.

The Mediterranean sun shone on our start in the yacht, of which my uncle De Myre was decidedly not worthy. Everything was radiant to me that day, save that I was sad at having to leave my father, who was deeply engrossed in a new work, and had kissed me perfunctorily ; I expected to receive a telegram,

a letter, anything, from him before the yacht sailed—but nothing came.

Stephane, standing at the stern, watched multi-coloured Marseilles disappearing. He was clever enough—for he liked to flatter and knew the value of it—to whisper the memorable words of Chateaubriand which our departure recalled :

“ Youth is a charming thing ; it starts at the dawn of life, crowned with flowers, like the Athenian fleet.”

And we, too, were setting forth to conquer Sicily and the delectable meads of Enna ; we were even to push on to the Isles of Greece, fair goddesses of the sea with snow-white shoulders emerging from the waves. For me also would the pæan be sung while the sails were spread in the rays of dawn, and the words uttered by Stephane would be spoken in place of those of the priest of Neptune. I, too, bear in my features the beauty of Love, and the seven cars I have not driven on the Olympic track are my youthful passions, swifter than triremes. . . .

Soon will rise before me the isle of Alcinous, Stephane, the isle of which you have not spoken ; soon the illusion will be dispelled, and there will arise the grey mist of dawn. . . . And then nothing will be left to me, not Timandra's bosom, nor even, to lighten the weight of my chains, the few lines of Euripides, which consoled the friends of his youth.

. . . Nevertheless I hail thee, O youth of mine !
. . . I salute you, fair scenes ; and you, my Joy
rise like a column, fairer and more slender as you rise,
all unknowing that the day will come when you will
entirely vanish

IX

In the course of our trip I learned to know Stephane better and better, and also to yield to his influence.

I have already spoken of his wonderful powers as a conversationalist, one of those who speak their lives instead of writing them ; so peerless a talker that, no matter what he may produce later, his conversation will still be superior to it, and his work, save a few maxims and tales, will always prove somewhat disappointing when one remembers him. Even if what he said were devoid of meaning, he could have concealed the fact by the wonder of his talk.

A man to whom all things seemed to be known, he appeared to have solved all the problems of life ; he knew everything, spoke on all subjects, had an opinion on everyone ; the subordinate teacher in the college from which he had at last escaped, was one who might have taught the world. Even his way of bringing out the most subversive opinions in a final and authoritative manner satisfied the secret desires of a mind like mine that was ever in quest of novelty. It was compelling.

So during this trip, on every occasion, whether it was statues we looked at, cities we visited, Cyprus or Athens that we saw, Stephane impressed upon me in some way his æsthetic conception of life, an unmoral, conscienceless conception, an exploitation of the Tree

of Life which my own heart had already suggested to me, a conception not unlike that held by Goethe in his youth when he exclaimed: "*Beauty is greater than Good, since it includes the Good.*"

Stephane might also have been classed with Nietzsche, for he, too, was utterly devoid of morality. They both represented thought in its freest form. Each of them was, in his way, the type of the free-thinking generation that followed Renan's, but neither of them possessed his softened scepticism, his subtle and smiling disillusion. The Breton seminarist retained to the end a mystical, shimmering mist round his soul, while these two seemed to have shaken off the dust of Christianity. Both seemed to have thrown aside their divine heredity as it were a cocoon, and they remained uninfluenced by any mediaeval dreams, by any longing for the cloister, such as is felt by the most incredulous among us and is, at bottom, the involuntary remembrance of our childhood and our youth.

Never for them did the bells of Ys ring, those heavenly bells that can sound even when the steeples are sunk beneath the ocean, the faithful who crowded the churches gone, and the faith in the hearts of the believers dead also. An essential part of human sensibility appeared to be wanting in them. They had cast aside the unforgettable and romantic tales of the human God which never cease to cheer and charm us, even in our moments of blackest despair.

Pagans as they were, they never felt the charm of that which fades, the sweetness of that which dies, the perfume lingering in the empty censers, the beauty of improbable religions whose expiring throbs attract and retain, the influence of faiths that one sees slowly

dying out as die out the altar lights consumed by their own flame.

Yet their two forms of paganism were, nevertheless, so different that each was absolute in his way. What can be more tragic and bitter than Nietzsche's paganism? How utterly different it is from the bright and happy attitude of mind to which we give the name. His mode of understanding Hellenism lacked, too, the joyous irresponsibility, the arrogant confidence in happiness, the impassible and radiant ideal that Matthew Arnold has described in a celebrated essay. Nietzsche had delved deeper into Greece. Having studied it, he knew that the Greeks were continually wrestling with the problem of sorrow; that they were moral athletes for whom it was not enough to have created myths wherein their demigods slew lions, but who were striving to strangle the suffering in their own hearts.

Does not the whole of Greek literature, to anyone who penetrates its essential meaning, bear pathetic witness to that incessant struggle? No one, since the time of the Greeks, has so pathetically described grief or so suavely told of the remedies of pain. Thou art but a modern creation, O world of fauns and nymphs, of Pan and Amaryllis! The true world of antiquity, like the modern world, is a universe of suffering.

That is what Nietzsche understood: the whole difference lies in the manner of facing the suffering, and if Nietzsche chose the classical way, it is because he was acquainted with forms of torture for which complacent modern faith can apparently offer no remedy. Unquestionably, Nietzsche was a pagan, utterly pagan, but he was the Pascal of paganism.

He had the same tragic sincerity, the same inexpressible pain, the same sense of the void.

There was nothing of this in Stephane, upborne as he was by amazing impassibility. As far as he was concerned, life was the only thing that existed, and it sufficed for his entertainment. He felt that he must enjoy that life unfettered in any way, with no interference in his pleasure.

He considered moral obligations mere restrictions, like prejudices. If the world were to be a possible place to live in, a young and beautiful man like myself should give free rein to his passions, and enjoy himself in every way. Never have I seen in anyone such happiness in the thought of universal negation, greater indifference at the thought of death and nothingness.

Like my father, but following a wholly opposite rule of life, Stephane cast a golden veil upon the stark corpse of life. At that time I was incapable of perceiving that such a doctrine cannot impart strength and support to the soul; it was the sort of doctrine called for by my unsatisfied, unsated youth.

I recall a night in Athens when, absolutely intoxicated with his eloquence, I looked upon myself as the god of a new life.

On our return, he insisted that we should cross over to England, where he passed a portion of his youth, and which seemed to him more of a modern Greece than that grave of Dead Beauty we had beheld in the course of our cruise. He even obtained leave from my father for us to spend a few months at Oxford, where he had acquaintance with, and was admired by the head of one of the colleges, a Mr. Warren.

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Oxford made upon me one of the deepest impressions of my life, and to me its stones speak as eloquently as those of Venice.

In Oxford I enjoyed with Stephane hours of incomparable delight . . . The scent of the honeysuckle, the calls of the deer, the verdant charm of the lawns, the prose of Walter Pater, austere and penetrating—all this seemed to float in the air. It does not seem to me possible to escape the charm of Oxford . . . And then there was the delight of catching a glimpse of the author of *La Renaissance*, and to know him in the very heart of the movement towards beauty, a true renascence of the æsthetic spirit born in England at this time.

From my childhood I had loved English literature and English poetry, loved it as I loved that eternal mother, Greek literature, the one and only source of individual lyricism, Latin being no more than a drying-up of the soul, and bearable only in some ecclesiastical prose. English literature seemed to me very great. Certain passages of the incomparable Swinburne, some of Pater's prose, fairly witched me. I had delighted in Beardsley's arabesques, so strong and so tortured before his work lost some of its value by becoming fashionable. I had owned before anyone else some delicious water-colours by Conder, which will be found after my death.

It moved me deeply to find myself thus in the very home of all I most admired, in the very land of that beauty so precious to me, in that England which was not the England of Miss Light or of Mrs. Humphry Ward, but the Promised Land of Beauty.

For there are two Englands: one of them is strong, powerful, imperialistic, careless of intellect

and rotten with cant; that England I hate. It is not very much superior to other nations. It has invented wars and inferior writers; it drove out Byron and failed to understand Shelley; it has been ruled by Queen Victoria and Rudyard Kipling, and has flooded the world with that multitude of popular novels which appear to be a proof of fecundity, and are merely the proof of terrifying ability to produce bad literature by the yard.

England, strong and truly great at times, with the sea for its thought, and the waves thereof for its soul; England, cold and generous, owning no master save the Duty it has itself wrought out of its own hard flint; abrupt England, cruel and chaste, filled with hypocrisy and conscience beneath its swooping sea-birds.

. . . But there is another England, vast, eternal, full of light, mistress of poetry as Germany is mistress of music. The vase to which a young poet spoke, the lark whose ultra-celestial rhythm Alastor's heart follows, a line of Shakespeare—these are her treasures.

She is prouder of possessing in a secular church the heart that would not burn, than, in an official tomb, the dust that was Cromwell, the dust that shall be Kitchener. . . .

She knows that it was her other self that hated Swinburne, drove forth Childe Harold, and looked upon Tennyson as her greatest poet. . . .

But she engraves the lines of Anactoria on tablets of diamond, and inflames the heart of the young men of the future.

What matter to her the Transvaal, New Zealand,

or which member of her House of Lords—where Byron's seat will always seem to her empty—will be sent as viceroy to India? What cares she for renewed conflicts of nations?

Little she cares for Lord Roberts' heavy dignity, or that of Beatty or Jellicoe, and the four hundred millions of inhabitants of her united Empire, the most populous in the world next to China; she is prouder and feels more independent in her morning hours on the shores of her ever-free seas because of a few lines she has created, and which linger in the memory of men.

Prouder than of any victory—for evanescent are victories, evanescent are defeats!—when she can proclaim in Keats' voice:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever!

when she utters, in Swinburne's voice, the last words of dying Sappho, when the tones of Shelley prelude the eternal Epipsychidion:

Sweet Spirit Sister of the orphan one
Whose empire is the name thou weepest on . . .

Land of Beauty, New Athens, I penetrated your very heart on that day when, guided by Stephane, I entered Oxford, O England that I love!

Your poets crowd in my heart, a flock of doves! The words of those youths who died at the age of Endymion, after a sail at sea, fill my soul with undying harmonies.

Is it not right, then, that I should come to pray

on the Acropolis of St. Mary Magdalen before entering on Life Terrible?

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O home of lost causes, of unrealisable ideals, this morning your lawns are as smooth as emerald mirrors.

In the shadows, your grey colleges hide behind the trees. It is now the hour of hours when, after morning lectures, emerging from the pellucid rooms, strong youths, full of Hellenism and tea, bathe in the still heat. The whole University becomes peaceful, invaded and penetrated by matutinal somnolence . . . It is noon, noon in Oxford . . .

O inexpressible, incommunicable charm, full of magic and memories! Yonder, the splendid fields, starred with fritillaries, are traversed by a stream that leads to London and the sea. To neither shall we go. Let the vessel that would take us wait in vain, with its sails motionless in the voluptuous heat. Here shall I stop and wait, for it is noon, noon in Oxford . . .

O Trinity! O Winchester! I have not been subject to your rule. I came by the road of Joy, and here I am, O radiant and luminous temple of youth and play, with your white columns bathed in the current that flows to the sea. Yes, I came with flying feet; I followed the road of pleasure and reached this Paradise. It is noon, noon in Oxford . . .

Here stands the Tree of Life, the tree of which I may perchance taste the fruit, that unknown fruit. . . As at evening the twilight wraps all things in gravity and happiness, so the burden of original sin no longer

weighs down my shoulders. How old think you I am, venerable lawn? What age think you is mine, O youthful Sun? I am the same age as the immortal gods who danced in the grey of morn by the edge of the azure shore.

. . . I am twenty, twenty—and in Oxford! . . .

X

September 10.

In 1913, at the opening of the spring, after my trip to Greece, after my stay in England, I found myself in Paris, and Stephane was taking me back to my family.

My father was just then at his house in Rue de Babylone, where he had been getting in the habit of spending the winter. He did not come to meet me at the station, as I had hoped he would. I had had no farewell from him; I had no welcome home.

I found him changed, though I could not tell in what way. Our relationship till then had been somewhat distant, but it had been a very real tie.

Now, on seeing him again, I had at once the feeling that a break had occurred during my absence, and that an abyss separated us. He evidently felt strongly and was oppressed by my grandmother's influence. He, formerly so free, so grandiose, seemed to have shrunk under the shadow of her chilling age.

There was also another influence acting upon him, more important and more effective, the influence of Princesse Olkonsky, who was more and more entering into his life, and appeared to be amusing

herself by striving to gain possession of his great solitary mind.

I sensed it at once.

Unfortunately, neither my grandmother nor Mme. Olkonsky had any affection for me. It was they, in truth, who had engineered the trip which had separated me from my father, and thus diminished our common past, impoverishing our background of remembrances . . . It seemed to me that my absence from home had been turned to account to transform my father, to rob me of even the occasional inattentive glances he used to cast upon me in the intervals of his meditations in the old days.

I can recall him on the day I arrived, scarcely moved at seeing me again, as though he had become another person. He had taken to seeing the Myres and the Estissacs, whom he had avoided so long, and who bored him to death. I could no longer glimpse in him the exalted and amazing mind that, on a morning of my childhood, had seemed to revivify the old walls of the Académie. He looked older, different, distant.

That very evening he was dining with Princesse Olkonsky at her apartment in Spontini Street . . . I would have loved to dine alone with him, and now could only look forward to a meal with my grandmother, most venerable of companions, in that dining-room hung with yellow damask and filled with prejudices.

So I went with Stephane to dine at the Ritz.

Stephane had become a habit with me. If my father seemed distant, Stephane had, in the course of our trip, made himself practically indispensable

to me. All the reasons I have enumerated caused him to cling feverishly to me. He had become more than a tutor: a friend whom I could hardly have done without.

I love intellectuality, and Stephane possessed an exceptional intellect, somewhat artificial, it may be—I did not notice it at the time—but brilliant. I loved poets and beauty, and no one talked to me of them so well as did Stephane; no one dwelt on the subjects I loved with such marvellous skill as a talker. I delighted in flattery; no one could flatter me as he did.

We had a charming dinner at the Ritz. I remember that, after the meal, a number of people began to dance in the garden. Stephane watched them with his quizzical glance, which united the arrogance of a parvenu to that of a conqueror . . .

That evening was the beginning of my young manhood in Paris. I had lived there as a youth. Then had come the trip to Greece. For a full year—an age at my time of life—I had been absent from the city I loved, and it now seemed to me more beautiful than ever. The delicate freshness of early spring was in the balmy air; the soft night was perfumed. Women went by, vivacious and excited, with voluptuous movements of their full skirts. They hastened towards the garden, their lips eager for the coolness of mingled moonlight and dew . . . Or they returned to where the slim dancer, slender in his black coat, was waiting for them.

Stephane looked at me as he stretched his hand out towards the young women who were moving towards that whirling world.

I see them all again now, those gracious forms,

for the pleasures of my life assume all their faces in turn.

It seemed to me as if all these fair women, the diners who were just leaving their tables, and those who were out in the little garden imprisoned behind the Place Vendôme, had involuntarily come together to fête my return, their faces expressing pleasure and voluptuousness. At every table there was someone I knew . . . It was as if the city to which I had returned was welcoming me in their friendly smiles.

The young Duchesse de Vallières, *née* Grazzioli, a curious compound of strength and morbidness, who, like my mother, had come from Italy, was dressed in such soft, tenuous stuff that one expected every moment to see her gown slip down and reveal her nude, as if she were a strange modern nymph whose garments had been no more than a scarf. I had often seen her at our house, but that evening she appeared to me more extraordinary and more captivating than before. Her dark curls fell down to the dreamy eyes that dominated her face, eyes whose velvety glances could be felt before you saw them, glances that were like the subtle perfume of a soul.

The dinner ended—she was with two or three friends, one of whom was a tall young fellow from the British Embassy who looked like Lamartine and a stable-man in one—she rose, crossed the room, and went to the lawn where the dancing was going on as if her body were weary of too much rest and longed for the caress of music. She passed close to us, and recognised me. I was a youth of seventeen when she had last seen me: she now

found me a young man, and almost imperiously drew me to the impromptu dance in the shadow of the little trees . . .

The dance over, I returned to Stephane . . . Other women passed and came . . .

There was Jeanne de Ludre, tiny, fair, fluffy, shining with the feverish grace of one on the point of death; there was the young Princesse de Waterloo, whose sexless charms were arrogantly set off by an impertinent golden dress; there was the Princesse de Servinge, *née* Sudry, whose blending of Creole grace and English indifference seemed to give to the Ritz air a breath of the Indian Ocean; there was Rose de Poilly, who loved women better than men, with head held high, her eyes glazed, her lips parted, looking like an angry boy, a sort of Daphnis or Achilles who had come disguised in women's clothes among the daughters of King Lycomedes—Rose who loved me for a whole fortnight because she found me different from other men.

Where are you now, dancers of that night, faces that smiled voluptuously on my return?

Where are you, Marie-Thérèse d'Avrignan, pale as a white rose in your close-fitting dress of pearl satin, your little head held up impertinently, your eyes full of despair, your hair dressed high as if to show off the swan-like neck, imprisoned in a high collar of pearls that gave you an air of looking down on the world? . . . Where are you now, Marie-Thérèse d'Avrignan? . . . Yes, I remember now; you died in London one night, no one knows how.

And where are you, Antoinette Sagradin, created

for pleasure, alluring and savoury as a rare fruit, who loved restaurants and gambling-halls because your style of beauty seemed appropriate to them? Antoinette, who delighted in music-halls, but who never for a moment lost the charming indifferent look she cast on everything, herself included.

Where are you, Hélène Delange, who loved me so fiercely a whole season, and whose letters pain me when I re-read them? Hélène, whom I hurt without intending to do so, whose heart was at one time so restful to me, on whose bare shoulder I should have loved to sleep, who was so full of unconscious protective instinct that I would have chosen her for my sister in a life made to suit ourselves.

Where are you, Betty Landembrooke, who always wore turquoises because of your superstition? And you, Christiane de Merville, who was my cousin, and who found it as easy to do away with yourself as I shall? . . .

The truth is, I never loved any of you, for none of you cost me a single tear . . . But a painful fascination drew me instinctively, and in a fraternal way, to your wisdom, women so facile yet so disconcerting, so ill-armed for the battle of life, who only felt yourselves truly living when you gave yourselves up to pleasure—host of women, more affectionate, more insatiable than the mediocre array of men.

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. . . As we were going home that night through the silent streets of Paris, Stephane spoke to me in

the darkness. He offered me the sleeping city, handed me its keys.

"Take," he said, "the voluptuousness scattered throughout all things, and which smiles upon you; subject it to your longing and your mystery. Let the pleasure of the age become incarnate in you."

. . . And over the Paris he thus offered me, over that nocturnal Paris brimming over with promise, that Paris as enthralling in its way as Oxford with its multitude of young gods, rose the moon, pale as a woman who has swooned, spreading round her silence and a kind of milky oppression. It rose like a large pallid Host, held out to us over the grey roofs of the houses . . . The Place Vendôme slumbered in silvery vapour in an atmosphere at once pleasing and funereal . . .

"Let us walk back . . . Dismiss the car," said Stephane.

And so we strolled back through that silent city lighted by the moonbeams, so different from those of the sun some hours ago. They seemed to me like the rays of my own heart, for though I was but twenty, it was already dead.

When we were nearly home, we recognised two faces in a carriage that passed us. It was my father being taken home by the Princesse Olkonsky, his habitual confidante.

It was almost a year since we had met, and I knew when I reached my room that he was in his, close by, and I wanted to go to him. Perhaps he, too, was wishing to see me . . .

But we saw nothing of each other that night.

XI

And the days passed . . . My father and I more and more rarely saw each other, more and more rarely exchanged remarks, only a few words at meals, scarcely ever at other times. Was it my fault or his?

My father's days were given up to his work, which was as exacting and important as ever. He went out in the evening, often dining with friends, and twice or thrice a week at the Princesse Olkonsky's. My grandmother had gone back to Aigues-Mortes, but unfortunately not for long.

What was wrong between my father and myself, and how did it happen that I was so incredibly foolish as to allow the breach between us to grow wider? It is so easy to get into the way of not caring for each other . . . to rid oneself of the bonds of affection, of all that binds us to and unites us with the past

There was no conflict between us, and indeed no real reason for any estrangement, none of those happenings that make an abyss between father and son, which is all the wider because it is due to misunderstood affection. It is true that a large part of my childhood had been spent without much intercourse between us, but there had been no serious disagreements. Had he not burnt the notebook in which he had seen a side of me that he did not like? And

had we not been reconciled afterwards? Had he not clasped me close to him as we stood before the fire that night?

What had happened since then? I had never allowed him to suspect the doubt aroused in me by his work, nor the sense of emptiness, the feeling of lack of help that struck me in his idealism . . . Besides, what mattered to him one disciple the less, he who had all the youth of the day following him?

No, I did not share his views, but that he was not aware of . . . And then, what is the use of ideas if they do not arouse spiritual contest? So far, what other reason for dissatisfaction had I given him except that my thoughts were different from the possibly fictitious ideas he conveyed to other men?

It is true I had not turned out to be the docile and blameless pupil desired by my grandmother's paltry vanity, but had I not developed and changed during the long voyage, arranged by them, with Stephane?

People who love each other should never part. We ought not to have separated at so crucial a moment. Every hour lived apart may mean the rising of a foe dwelling within us that will work with concentrated power against ultimate reunion . . .

But the abyss was there . . . Each of us was to take his own way . . . Ah, why did I not foresee that at the time? Why did I not, that very night, go and knock at his door? I might have prevented so much unhappiness. Whatever the difference in our ways of looking at life, our affection would have held us together in spite of ourselves.

Beings ought to be created with a view to loving teach other. No idea is sufficiently important to sever two souls; the least important soul is of greater account than any idea.

. . . Nevertheless, the breach was there. The incompatibility of thought, the conspiracy of silence that grew continually on both sides, resulted in this—my father and I were strangers to each other. We lived under the same roof, but in spite of that we were strangers.

My new life organised itself on fresh lines, and others profited by it. It seemed as if a bodyguard surrounded him, bent on keeping us apart; my grandmother, the Princesse Olkonsky, several members of her family . . . Oh, why was there not some wise and intelligent arbiter to throw us into each other's arms?

For we were made to love and sustain each other, no matter what ideas and people strove to separate us.

But at the time I did not realise this. Disappointed in my father, I returned to Stephane, and the breach became wider and wider. Stephane kept drawing me farther and farther from him, and probably my disappointment and grief at failing to find him led me to acts that made matters still worse . . .

That springtime was the most bewildering of my life. Bereft of what would have been a restraining influence, I gave myself up wholly to the festival of my youth that called to me in the voice of Stephane.

Stephane took me everywhere, and used me to make himself master of Paris. No one would have recognised the humble school-teacher of a year

ago in that master of mine, in that Socrates of a New Athens. I do not believe my father saw Stephane at all just then. He still looked upon him as a tutor, and was not in the least aware of what Stephane had become. He was not long to be left in ignorance of the fact . . .

During that spring of 1913, wherever I went I was accompanied by Stephane Savage, and wherever Stephane Savage went, there went I. I lived with my father in the Rue de Babylone. Stephane had taken rooms on a ground-floor in the Avenue Henri Martin. An uncle of his had just died and left him some money.

Theatres, museums, music-halls, all places were for us a subject of interest, experience, curiosity, excitement. For we both understood and loved the same things. Then there was the social side; I introduced Stephane to our set, and his brilliant wit quickly consolidated his position there.

There was no drawing-room that did not know us, and in which Stephane's paradoxes were not heard, from that of the Duchesse de Cerny to that of Mme. Barchilde, if one may call "drawing-room" what Stephane called "an aquarium." . . .

For the impossible Mme. Barchilde insisted on having Stephane to dinner as soon as he became the fashion, and she invited me into the bargain. Although he had not yet published anything except a few articles in the *Renascence of Beauty*, his amazingly witty conversation had made him celebrated in Paris in the short space of three months.

So one evening he honoured the "aquarium." And we dined there. It was in a flat in the Rue de Lubeck, furnished in aggressively bad taste,

and in which every room was a drawing-room, even the bedroom, so entirely did Mme. Barchilde live for society. There was no bathroom, and I fancy that this Parisian siren, so clever in arranging rooms for five o'clock teas, must have performed her ablutions, if any, in the shell-shaped vase standing in the centre of the yellow salon where, on reception days, Princesse Olkonsky was wont to feed the Japanese fishes with bits of bread, the little creatures swimming to the edge of the great shell the moment she appeared.

Mme. Barchilde, by dint of being a widow, which simplifies many matters, by dint of being a Jewess, which affords a splendid pretext for a sensational, though late, baptism at which you eat your own dragées, had succeeded at last in getting together a cosmopolitan circle, in which she really believed that she made Académiciens and unmade Ministers.

My grandmother had never entered her doors and pretended she could not pronounce her name, but under the guidance of Hedda Olkonsky, my father allowed himself to be taken there, and even to be intoxicated by the absurd flatteries she addressed indiscriminately to M. Bergson and to the Grande Duchesse de Neustria, to Rappoport and to Joseph Nulpart.

Whether through carelessness or avarice on her part, or whether this daughter of Jerusalem and old Father Myrtil Goldschmidt—whose whole business career had been a series of bankruptcies—disdained to build up her social prestige, as did the memorable Mrs. Moore, on the culinary skill of her *chef*, the dinner itself was an awful meal.

In the dining-room, which, in the afternoon, be-

came a drawing-room, so entirely did metamorphoses appear to be the correct thing in that house, and so completely did Lucienne Barchilde seem herself to be the fairy Urgèle at the exact and critical instant when she is about to renew her youth without ever quite succeeding in doing it, she presented the other guests to us—a former Minister who was under a cloud, a genuine duchesse no longer received in our house, but who was so charming that she was worth the trip from the Faubourg Saint-Germain to the Ghetto, the Princesse of Waterloo herself, who was tickled by the knowledge that her presence was a scandal; two or three novelists devoid of talent, a member of the French Académie with his mistress, and the Marquis de Barcelonnette, who, in accepting her as a friend, had for the first time been deceived in the value of a work of art.

Stephane was simply bewilderingly brilliant . . . About ten o'clock, Hedda Olkonsky turned up, and I have always been convinced that Mme. Barchilde had brought the other guests together in view of the prospective encounter between these two wits. And indeed it was a terrible duel, for they hated each other at once, and fought with metaphors hurled at each other's heads.

I can still see the Princesse Olkonsky. Round her and Stephane the other guests sat effaced. As a rule, Mme. Olkonsky was absolute mistress in that house. Under a portrait of her by Helleu, Lucienne Barchilde placed fresh roses every morning. Did the Princesse notice, on this occasion, that the petals were a week old and that Mme. Barchilde, whose sole excuse for presuming to be alive was, in her opinion, that she should always be in adoration before her

genius, appeared to set high store by Stephane Savage, who possessed for her all the attraction of novelty? . . . Immediately, she appeared to be ill at ease, nervous, disarmed, so to speak, for these excitable, mechanical dolls of talkative virtuosity need to be kept constantly wound up by the applause of a wondering audience . . .

That evening it was Stephane who carried off the honours, and she never forgave him . . . Once before, a similar bitter experience had been hers, at Mrs. Lilienthal's, when she met André Sperelli, the famous Italian poet, whom she failed to surpass in conversation or to bring to her feet by the charm of her personality.

As for Lucienne Barchilde, while the contest lasted, she seemed delighted beyond all expression. Her eyes flashed round a glance, at once perfidious and artless, in search of thanks for the entertainment she had provided. And suddenly there rose before me a face, the face of a woebegone shade, the face of her husband, whom I knew as a child, and who had died early enough to enable her to become the kind of "young widow who receives."

Jean Barchilde used to come to our place from time to time, for he was a friend of my father's; he had even, if I remember rightly, been at college with him. He was a man of bright intellect, smiling, with a touch of gentle disillusion in his searching glance; and there was what seemed to me an unreasonable irony in his attitude towards things in general.

But that evening I glanced at his portrait—also surrounded with roses—which from a corner continued to cast a tone of respectability upon the drawing-room, a drawing-room Princesse Olkonsky excused

herself for entering by saying that her brothers, on their side, went to bars. Then I looked at the company, always contemptuous if interested, before whom the hostess continually posed; at the hostess herself, so settled in her forgotten but well-exploited widowhood, a gliding, fleeting figure, passing from one guest to another, unintelligent, a wretched conversationalist, and I understood the depth and meaning of the smiling, ironical expression that used to puzzle me.

.

Was I myself really the cause of my success, of the excitement I created?

Everyone welcomed and flattered me. How could I help responding to what surrounded me on every side? Who would not have acted as I did? Who would not have allowed the joy of Youth to push melancholy into the background?

For some months I squeezed life as one squeezes a lemon, pressing its acid and mordant fruit in my hands till they bled from excess of pleasure. Love, sensuality, triumphs of intellect and of the flesh, I have known them all. I have left my mark on lives into which I burnt. I have seen so many faces alter on my account that I began to enjoy watching the changes. I took delight in writing my beauty and my youth on the sands of the hearts that offered themselves to me.

That was due partly to my own nature, and partly to the teaching of Stephane. In turn I was frivolous or plunged in despair. When I questioned Frivolity, it answered "Pleasure"; when I interrogated Despair, it gave the same answer.

I could write a whole book of anecdotes ; I could, like Don Juan, exhibit a list of names, but it would be nothing but a list of names, and what would that amount to ? In my soul these names are summed up in but one name.

O you who loved and cherished me, you who, when I disbelieved in it, taught me anew the purity of my body, will you prevent my dying ? . . .

You who wanted to give so much, and who did give your adoration and your tears, your caresses and your lamentations, you who made me move in an atmosphere of oppression and desire, who created in your mind an image of me that you can never forget, will you prevent my dying ? . . . Will you add one day, one hour, one minute to my life ? . . .

Shall I carry away into the void more than I should have were it not for you, you who have spoken words so rich in love that they seemed to burst into flame when you uttered them ?

Can you prevent my disappearing entirely ? Can the blows of Destiny fall harmless on the cuirass of pearls wrought from your passionate caresses, your supplications, your prayers ? Can you turn into a spell conferring immortality the words : " I have been loved " ?

This useless glory is of no avail. It will not give me one day longer on this earth. But in the earth where I shall sleep, those kisses of yours will hover round me like bees.

XII

September 12.

At evening parties, at fêtes, at balls, at amorous rendezvous at the Ghetto, at Mme. de Charmillan's masked ball, Stephane invariably was with me. A legend was forming round my name in Paris . . .

Paris enjoys producing legends; it needs them. It was indispensable that at night, on the cushions of her chamber, half drawing, half bed-room, on the cushions still full of the crumbs of toast the old Comtesse de Mauvrigneuse could not finish, Mme. Barchilde, *née* Meyer, should be able to whisper scandal in the ear of the Marquis de Barcelonnette.

My father was certain to learn the kind of life I was leading. He was bound to be told. People were certain to spatter the ivory tower from which he directed his thoughts on the universe with the mud of my violent youthful passions. For it was apparently not sufficient that day by day we should grow further apart; we must become enemies . . .

May those who wrought that result bitterly repent it! What happiness did they give my father, whom they pretended to love?

The continual appearance of Stephane and myself in a city where I was already so well known, gave rise to every kind of rumour. Things were said that

I was aware of, others of which I was ignorant. Every variety of jealousy was fed by them; the jealousy of my father, which was never allowed to manifest itself openly; jealousy of Stephane, due to the terrible cruelty of his tongue; and the jealousy that I myself caused.

It was proclaimed as a matter of notoriety, and believed pretty much by everybody, that I was leading a depraved and shameless life, that Stephane was urging and aiding it, and that I was dragging my father's name in the mire.

One day he sent for me.

I felt he had been prejudiced against me, as on that night when he had destroyed my notebook. It was not he whom I beheld, but a singular judge, a being recreated in his own image by the plottings of others.

I saw at once what he wanted: that I should part from Stephane Savage.

At first he imperiously ordered me to do so, then he pleaded with me. He explained what he had heard about me on all sides and told me he considered Stephane the evil genius of my troubled youth.

I know that everyone will blame me, and ask how I could hesitate between Stephane's friendship and ensuring my father's peace of mind. But was it really for my own sake that he desired it? Had he been throughout the kind of father who has the right to ask a great sacrifice for his sake? Suppose I did give up Stephane, what would my father give in return? What compensating love could I expect from him?

I refused, and I went out into the night . . .

What would I not give to-day to have sacrificed

everything to him then, my mind, my youth, and all the Stephanes in the world !

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All ties between us now appeared to be broken. He seemed hardly able to bear my returning to rue de Babylone at night, and made me feel that it was only by extraordinary indulgence that I was allowed to do so.

As the spring drew to a close and summer approached, I left Paris. Stephane accompanied me to Deauville, where I lived in a quiet little seaside villa, hidden among the pines. O villa on the seashore, with your English garden and your white geraniums ! . . .

. . . A single month at the gaming-tables was enough to initiate me into all the caprices of chance.

In September I went to Venice at the invitation of the Duchesse Ascalati, to her palace on the lagoon where she gathered round her artists, poets, and philosophers—a sleepy palace, where we used to dance by the waters, and where Ida Rubenstein made her appearance in a ballet.

What strange restlessness filled me ! It was with countries as with human hearts. I drew all I wanted of them in a few weeks, and a long stay in any one place was, to me, like being with a former mistress.

Within a month, Venice bored me. Forgive me, City of pleasure, of silence, City of fiery passions and morbidity. Too many lovers have shed in your waves their easily-foreseen tears ; you have be-

come the too-official altar of despair, of languor and of passion . . . You resemble the poems the beauty of which would strike one were they not so hackneyed, so worn out with usage; you are thin and evaporated, like the sorbets in your Café Florian . . .

From Venice I went to Florence, where the autumn had erected a splendid golden tent. I saw the city grow blonde in the sunshine of its dead trees. I saw the terrace where Elizabeth of Austria used to take refuge and look out at the sea; then I went to another town, quite a little town, close to the other, the name of which I shall not say. Why should I give its name to strangers? Why ravish its secret?

There, in the rarefied air of autumn, guided by Stephane, who knew Italy, and accompanied by another person whose name I have forgotten, I felt that all the scattered beauty of Italy was packed in one quiet, unknown town.

XIII

Winter arrived, and with winter Paris and all it stood for to me in the way of beauty, easy conquests, love-affairs. Once more the curtain rose on the Paris of my twentieth year—and for the last time.

It seems to me as if everything that happened during that last winter hurried madly along, driving everything before it. I scarcely ever caught sight of my father. He was working, but I knew nothing of what his work was. Probably the Princesse Olkonsky, so expert at self-admiration, and so utterly uninterested in everything not herself and her genius, was the sole repository of his confidences.

Once more, however, I heard my father speak, and Stephane came with me to listen. Though he knew through me of my father's opposition to him, he did not seem to bear him any ill-will on that account; and to the letter my father wrote begging him to cease his companionship, I asked him to reply deferentially.

The occasion was the funeral of one of my father's friends, the Marquis de Dessonnes, who had died suddenly. I could not resist the desire to hear him, and I took Stephane with me.

It was a crisp February morning. We got to the church just as Mass was drawing to a close, and fol-

lowed the hearse to the cemetery, a vast garden of stone on the borders of Paris.

People who follow a corpse on a grey morning seem themselves to be breathed on by death. My father's face was impressive, touched as with some sort of supreme immobility.

Joseph Nulpart was there, laughing, rubbing his hands, red-faced, in an ill-fitting fur coat . . .

And all round, in the grey morning, the faces I had known in childhood, like ghosts from the past.

My grandmother was absent; for the moment she was ruling, with a high hand, at Aigues-Mortes.

Mme. d'Estissac followed in her carriage, steadfastly stuck by the side of her sister and everlasting husband . . . Other faces . . . the young Duchesse de Vallières, a vision of audacious grace; the Princesse Olkonsky, dressed like a bishop with an umbrella by way of crozier, was talking glibly to a group of mixed politicians.

. . . Then, in the cemetery, there were the speeches, which we listened to with the damp sand striking the cold into our feet, insipid speeches in which everyone spoke so easily of the dead man; the horrible speech of Nulpart, bold and grimacing, in which he appeared already to announce his candidature for the place occupied by Dessonnes; the soporific speech of one of the directors of the Académie, which ended by dulling even the grief of the family; then my father—my father at last!

A year had passed since we had really met, we who lived under the same roof, a year since we had really looked at one another; I, borne away in the storm of youth; he, protected from me by the watchfulness of friends that followed him everywhere,

and here we were meeting in the cold morning by the side of that hole into which we shall all fall in the end . . .

A steady rain is falling. My father has drawn up the fur collar of his coat round his pallid face . . . Yes, father, it is you . . . you have not changed. And we are on opposite sides of a grave with death between us to separate us still further . . .

Stephane has chosen our position so that we can see him. We are just behind the cross at the head of the grave, and he is at the side, standing by the coffin that is soon to be lowered into the grave.

A wave of emotion passes through me. Father, father, listen to me, I love you. The same feeling throbs in me as on that day in my childhood when I could hardly restrain my tears at the Académie . . .

I love you . . . and you yourself, instead of your expression of judge and master, you have on your face that look of despair that I saw when you stood by the bedside of my uncle that October evening . . . an expression like that of my own heart . . .

Father, father, I long to go to you, to dash towards you, to clasp you in my arms!

But there, in the rain of the grey morning, the deep hole gapes wide between us—that hole into which we shall descend . . .

XIV

What a time that was of feasting, of individualism, of liberty on the verge of death! Our souls are what they are, not merely because of the past and the present, but because of the future, and, like mirrors turned towards the horizon, they reflect sights they do not yet behold.

If we were all feeling that sort of desperate madness, was it not because of what was coming and was going to traverse the world, that mighty event that was going to bring so much Death with it? For, indeed, Joy, at that time, had the acid savour of what one tastes for the last time. The bland loveliness of the sky had a beauty one would not see again. There was an ephemeral feeling about everything.

It was noticeable that night at Mme. de Charmillan's ball, where I went dressed as an Eastern Prince; it pervaded the terrace at Versailles, where Marie-Thérèse d'Avrignan and I lingered on the spot where still waves the apricot scarf of the Princesse de Lamballe; it was in the frenzy that drove us from pleasure to pleasure, from dance to dance, from love to love, from one sensuality to another, in the ardour we showed in grasping

at everything, as if everything was soon coming to an end . . .

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Youth of mine, it was you that were dying ; delicious and deadly intoxication hurried by an invisible Watteau to the strains of exotic orchestras in the Paris you had filled with your mad splendour, it was you who were dying, and it was the foreboding of Death that led to your excesses.

Yes, you were smitten to the heart by sombre Fate that will not permit superiority, and shears with levelling blade all that is outstanding. In vain should I strive to make you live again ; I could only galvanise a dead body. For you had lost the precious blood in your veins before the Great Massacre began.

Sleep, O Youth, my only masterpiece, in your Crystal Coffin

PART III

September 13.

On the last day of July, I was to dine with Stephane at the Café de Paris, and afterwards go to the Princesse Junot's. On leaving my tailor's, I returned home to dress.

I do not know why I dawdled so much that evening. It may be that while in my own rooms I felt sheltered—and then I was under the same roof as my father. In spite of the remonstrances of his friends, he had not asked me to leave the house, nor did I wish to do so. I would not, in spite of Stephane's urgings, snap the last tie between us. Dear room, in which I shall never sleep again, who will rest within your walls? Who will alter the delightful arrangement of my books? Who will touch the trifles full of meaning to me, the exquisite yellow lacquer cabinet in the corner—in which I keep my favourite poets, the portraits from which my face looks out, the frail cheval glass that used to reflect the image of my youthful self?

Rumours of war were already abroad, but no one heeded them, no one credited them. Everybody brushed them aside, as people who are about to give a garden-party scout any premonition of a storm.

At eight o'clock I called for Stephane to go to dinner.

We asked for a private room, and dismissed my car . . .

Every detail of that evening is stamped upon my memory . . . Stephen sat opposite me . . . I could see my face in the mirror behind him, intensely pale, but with a slight flush of colour from the candle-shades.

His paradoxes annoyed me that evening. My heart seemed full of some powerful emotion; I felt a strange sense of disenchantment. What was the matter with me? Was not the intoxication of pleasure enough to fill my life? Once again the feeling of uselessness which has been the bane of my inmost dreams, weighed on me yet more heavily.

Meanwhile Stephane was talking: talking of a sensational entertainment that Madame de Polastron was about to give; of a Watteau drawing which he had seen in the afternoon at the auctioneers'; of a jewel that he had admired at Morgan's, of white enamel and pink pearls, which, he said, would have taken my fancy. Then he talked once more of the fête that was to take place next evening, and which might be the last before Death swept over the land . . .

At ten o'clock, the commissionaire who called our carriage (a little brown-haired man, I remember, with the Paris drawl in his voice), gravely asked us:

"Have you heard, gentlemen? A madman has just fired at Jaurès—he killed him."

II

Jaurès dead! Then are the liberty and ~~peace~~ of the world impoverished, and Blood, hitherto restrained by a sort of mysterious wisdom, may now flow unchecked.

Jaurès dead! Let the conquerors enter the arena; let frontiers be altered; let the heavens arrest its winds, and stay the flight of its birds!

Jaurès dead! Awake in all our souls, O eternal spirit of cruelty! Revive, vile lust of legal murder! Stalk forth, O grim spectre, called by our other great white-haired veteran "the guilty passion for military glory!"

Jaurès is dead! Now shall there be weeping women, disorganised railway-stations filled with departing men, trucks where, stained with red, like slaughtered sheep, men shall be but piles of torn flesh. Now shall there be orgies of drunkenness and loud music of the kind that masks the sorrow best becoming to man. Now shall there be armies who strive to forget their past suffering in some ancient song of blood, armies intoxicated with false heroism as they march down long sunny roads. There shall be generals with faces like angry dogs, who fling open the gates of the human slaughter-house!

Jaurès is dead! Oh, Morning Sun, rise now upon

blood-stained fields, upon nameless crosses, upon seventeen hundred thousand corpses. Now shall there be living hours of night so full of human wailings that a raised hand might feel the woe in the air ; there shall be feet of Annamites crushed in French leather, and everywhere the great shared Lie, that vast conspiracy of silence to hide whatever is not a lie. Cabinet ministers eternally hammering into the wretched brains of future generations the beliefs that they would fain reject ; great men large-hearted enough to perceive the uselessness of it all, but too timorous to say so.

All may die now, for Jaurès is dead . . .

III

Souls are separated by abysses made by themselves.—

(MME. DE STAEL.)

I returned home rather hurriedly, for I wished to see my father. I was aware that he differed from the dead prophet in almost every way, but he had met him and seen him. They had been like ships that pass in the night of human thought and that signal to each other, for they were never to meet again.

I knew that he appreciated the loftiness of Jaurès' inflexible mind, the flood of his eloquence, the deep intelligence in his blue eyes. One evening at the house of Jerome Fortier, the son of the famous chemist, they had had a long discussion in the midst of all the treasures of the far East which fill Fortier's rooms with lacquers and distance, with gilded Chinese figures and remote perspectives. All the great and luminous Utopias of their believers' souls had fluttered their pinions in the air of that room, in an atmosphere which seemed to have been imported from other climes.

Then they had gone off together, my father and Jaurès, into the Paris night, a night as clear as was the glance of him who is now dead. My father had dismissed his carriage and they had returned on foot, loitering on the way like truant schoolboys. My

father had told me all about it, about the silence of the street scarcely broken by their footfalls, the darkened city that knew not, and never would know, who were the pedestrians that, on this night, had tramped round its walls.

Suddenly, Jaurès had begun to recite poetry; he adored it, and his memory, at once richly stocked and accurate, was as mysterious as a desert full of sweet murmurs. There, in the dark, with sleep holding all save the lovers who still whispered together, Jaurès, his hand on my father's arm, recited poem after poem, hundreds from among the multitude that buzzed in him like captive bees and invariably imparted to his eloquence, no matter when he spoke, an unexpected honey of lyricism.

So, in the calm night, these adversaries, whose only weapons were those of the intellect, had finally felt themselves reconciled by the moving influence of the beauty which each bore in his heart.

On this evening, also, night had fallen when I got back; the concierge hardly caught sight of me.

I rushed into the house: possibly my father had not heard the news, and I, messenger of mourning, might tell him of this death-blow to the peace of the world.

My father had not come home, so the valet said; he believed that he was dining with the Princesse Olkonsky. I hastened up to my own room—for I felt the need of being alone: the rosy lights of the Café de Paris and Stephane's talk garnished with paradoxes had sickened me.

I felt an overpowering need of silently facing myself, of ascertaining why the death of Jaurès had so curiously impressed me and struck me as a personal loss.

I did not even know the man, while the death of friends of my childhood who were bound up in my earliest remembrances had not affected me at all. And many of my father's friends had passed away in the course of the last few years, whose disappearance had not seemed to me more than an individual occurrence that could not affect humanity. The death of Jaurès impressed me more, assumed greater weight, than the death of any relative. It stirred in me the same thrill as the death of Henry Leverlet, at twenty, who gazed out of eyes grey as the dawn at the life he knew so little; as did the brutal, tragic death of Andrès de Larma, the cause of which I only understood later. I felt as deeply moved by it as I had been by the loss of those two friends of my childhood, whom I had only learned to know truly in the mysterious problem of death. I had so long kept aloof from the world, a voluntary prisoner in the solitude of my own thoughts. I had lived so long in a world I had created for myself, that nothing could have startled me more than to find myself capable, as I now did, of being upset by something affecting mankind.

Flags, governments, politicians, all that men think, and their petty interests, whatever transforms them into that warring society which is nevertheless united by a paltry community of tastes and interests, whatever calls forth enthusiasm, or love in them, or will, or sacrifice, all appeared to me to be a sordid exchange, corrupting the soul like a temple infested by dealers.

Was it, I asked myself, only falsehood that repelled me, only that structure erected laboriously upon shams, upon honours usurped? Had I revolted

only against what is bad in society, instead of, as I had imagined, rebelling against the very spring of life, the primitive mystery of things ? For the death of Jaurès had stirred me to the roots of my being.

God knows what difference this thought made to me ! God knows how Hope flashed as fire from heaven in my soul that had abandoned all hope.

I had turned pale and wept for the loss of the stricken old man, for the heart for ever stilled. All was not, then, dead in me, since I could still be moved ! The bond between the world and my personality must have been renewed without my suspecting it. Life, the Universe, were then in some sense real, since I cared so much ! There were thoughts which I felt myself weak enough to defend, and thoughts still could make me shed tears !

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Jaurès, whose starry glance swept the world, aged Moses, stirring the rock of human hardness and causing a spring of love to flow from it, Jaurès before whom the Red Sea might have held back its waves of blood, can you ever forgive me, Master of all generous aspirations, for deriving from the grief of your removal a certain dreadful hope ? Can you forgive my having rejoiced in my belief that in the tears I shed for you, I seemed for a brief instant to have recovered the faculty of Hope ?

It was neither on your ideas nor on your dream of a better world that my tears fell as I walked alone in the night. Those unselfish paradoxes that emerge from the heart of revolutions like vapours of hope, influenced me less than Renan's gentle nihilism echoing in the bells of Ys. I am one of those to

whom the fairest hopes of the future are but useless remedies, since cure never ends in anything but death.

You believed that misfortune was due to men only, and that your helpful hand might drive away evil; you believed that when a few wrongs had been redressed, some injustices removed, and a few innocents freed, life would become possible . . . Sleep in peace in your glory, the happy glory that never doubted life!

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No, it was not your ideas that I mourned; it was the comfort shed by your words, the blue rays of your glance, that lightened the darkness of our times with something at once helpful and gentle. Even those who have no hope in anything, for whom the world is but gossamer embroidered on the void, may shudder at the disappearance, one after another, of the few stars that flash light upon us, and but for which the darkness of the world would be as awful as its nothingness.

I, who believe in nothing, Jaurès, who share none of those kindly illusions of yours that you showed as you walked with my father that night, reciting the lines of which your heart was full, I nevertheless believe that there are a few lofty souls close bound to this world—as nightingales are held by the rose—nourishing it with the ichor of their thoughts . . .

Life is an empty, disconnected play, performed in the presence of a pitiful audience in a theatre from which there is no exit . . .

The sole value it may possess, the only importance it enjoys, is in having a few spectators more extra-

ordinary than the others for whose benefit, it may be, the play is staged.

And since it has meaning for that mysterious élite, the futile drama of which we are involuntary spectators appeared to me somewhat less inexplicable. Yours was one of those great souls that make one forgive life. You were one of those who give to this strange human tragedy a value and meaning it would otherwise lack.

IV

Leaning on the balcony from which I overlooked the little garden, I saw the gate open and my father come in. A strange pallor seemed to veil his face, and he walked slowly and quietly.

People whom we behold without their knowing it look like our remembrances of them.

In one minute I was by his side. He had just come in, and the servant who had opened the door had stepped aside and disappeared.

In that little familiar room downstairs, the room one enters first, where hang the mirrors of my childhood and the tapestry I love as if it were woven out of my vanished youth, the tapestry upon which, before she was guillotined, my great grand-aunt, Pulcherie de Montesson, smiled, there was no one but he and I, and, like a third person, the dreadful news. The news was there, about to speak with my voice, for it would be the news, and not I, that would speak.

But at once I saw that my father knew : he stood before me motionless, paralysed by sorrow. Which of us would venture to break the lengthening silence ? Which of us would impart the news to that small fragment of the world that as yet knew it not ? Stand-

ing opposite each other, we stood reading each other's faces.

"You know it, then," I cried.

"Yes, we were told by telephone a moment ago at the Princesse Olkonsky's by Albert de Vernon, who had heard it at the office of *l'Echo de Paris* . . . Shall we go upstairs?"

His voice also was tremulous; he grasped the hand-rail as he walked up to the next floor.

In a moment we were in his room, and our mutual knowledge of the tragedy instantly broke down all barriers between us. He sat down in his favourite armchair by the fire, which was always lighted at night. I felt that though he spoke no word he needed me, and at once I was by his side, at his knees, like a child. And then I saw he was weeping, he whom I had scarcely ever seen shed a tear.

Who can describe the tears of one man for the loss of another? Or tell of the beauty of the tears that hold no remembrance of lost kisses, nor of physical ecstasy; tears which are begotten of thought?

Thus did Byron weep for Shelley; thus did Shelley weep for Keats, who died young as Adonis; but their tears were neither as disinterested nor as purely unselfish. Between the mourner and the dead was the bond of scenes observed together; an Italian bay with a solitary vessel, two spirited horses, on a morning at Ravenna, galloping together as one. There was in all this the sweetness which imparts deeper melancholy to the friendship of poets.

My father was not weeping for the loss of a friend. No remembrance, save that of their meeting at Jerome Fortier's, troubled his mind. In that little room,

in front of his fire in July, he was just a thinker mourning for another human thinker.

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His noble head rested on his beautiful hands, and his eyes shone through his fingers. He was weeping. I had not been mistaken. He shared my awe, my pain. He also was weeping over the adversary whose heart had ceased to beat.

"You must have been shocked, father. When the news flashed through Paris, I at once thought of you, and wished I could be with you when you heard it."

He made no answer. Tears choked his utterance . . . Then he pulled himself together, and in a very few words he made the scene live for me.

He made me see the quiet dinner-table in the white dining-room, with its wide mirror in which a blind-fold Cupid seemed to enjoy the image of his Dresden china dart; the dining-room, sparkling with cut-glass, flowers and lights; the room in which there had been so many charming dinners, where wit prevailed when kindled by the voice of Hedda Olkonsky, whose lyrical eloquence flashed on the guests like lightning from a distant star.

On this particular evening, three or four intimate friends had assembled to do homage to their brilliant hostess.

The political element was represented by Joseph Nulpart, supple and insidious, with the mannerisms of an intellectual tinsmith, and that sort of inconsequent ease of manner, that mingling of premature prudence, politeness and retrospective arrogance which

alternating periods of power and of opposition give to politicians.

Felician Saumaître, with his deceptively smiling face, like that of a hunchback ashamed of himself, was distilling irony filled with inoffensive venom, and the Princesse de Cherisay, Hedda's sister, had seemed effaced by the brilliance that placed her in the shade.

Then the startling ring at the telephone, the terrifying news like a blazoning flash of revolution in the calm atmosphere of the room and its talk of literature. Princesse Olkonsky had insisted on going out, had snatched up the first wrap that came to her hand, and my father and she had hurried towards the boulevards where the murder had occurred, where the blood was already beginning to flow . . . They had been taken to the spot where the body lay . . . They had seen it. I am certain that the Princesse Olkonsky, wrapped in her squirrel-lined cloak, spoke unforgettable words in the gloom of the little café. I am sure that my father bent gently forward, almost speechless, over the face from which life had fled.

From the moment we had met, my father and I had steadily avoided saying: "Jaurès is dead!" We spoke of "the news," "the accident," avoiding plain speech, as though the fact we mentioned would thus acquire greater reality, greater horror.

And now I knew that my father had seen him, had gazed upon the dead features that never again would be illumined by an uplifting thought, upon the eyes whose sightless orbs would never more be bright with their beautiful expression, upon the lips

that would never again speak generous words. He had seen all this—and he wept.

"This death is a torture to me," he said, and his voice, so deep was his feeling, had in it something of the pathetic strains of a violin. "It fills me with distrust of everything, it shakes my firmest beliefs."

"Then, father, the death of this man impresses you also, as something more than a death?"

"It does," he returned. "It suddenly seemed to me as I stood in that panic-stricken boulevard that war was on the point of breaking on us; that that revolver-shot, aimed at the very heart of pacificism, was the signal to men in all the world that the slaughter is about to begin."

And in truth the word "War" was throbbing in the air.

For some time it had oppressed the city, but we had resisted and fought against it as a calamity too awful to be possible. And now it seemed as if this pure-hearted old man, so full of love for mankind that no one would dare kill in his presence, had been the last barrier between us and it. Since the death of Tolstoy he had been our one last hope.

And it was this threat of world-war that had brought us together, my father and I, as father and son, separated though we were by all our ways of thought.

He went on:

"We are going to have war, I feel it, my son, I divine it. The blood shed to-night makes me sure of it. And war to-day will be horrible."

He appeared to be gazing beyond the present moment upon a human hell created by men, an abyss industriously and everlastingly fed by their hideous hands.

"But, father," I exclaimed, "though you may

not have realised it, is not war what you have always been in favour of; for have you not always placed the love of country above all other affections? Have you not carefully weighed the pros and cons, and declared that the murders it permits, the bodies it dedicates to a holocaust, all that it unchains of irremediable and sanguinary, cannot prevail over the energy, the courage, the virtue of sacrifice which it calls forth from each of us? Without foreseeing the consequences of your teaching, father, have you not helped in a way to cause this chance of giving one's life for a useless thing?"

How was it that I, who but a moment since had felt so close to his thoughts, now revolted against them?

My father looked at me gently, so gently that the inmost soul of him seemed to well forth from his eyes, so gently that never can I forget his glance, fuller of true humanity than all his masterpieces put together.

"Yes, it may be so," he said, and his voice trembled as he spoke, "it may be that I have thought these things and spoken them, but no matter how necessary the sacrifice may seem, it rends the heart when the hour strikes. Iphigenia has but to glance at Agamemnon's gesture to be no longer troubled by the fact of the Grecian fleet. I have declared needful the deeds that give the soul reasons to suffer for a cause, motives to rise above herself, to soar determinedly. Energy struck me as being a glorious deity capable of striking from souls moral flashes, and whatever draws us from our own selves, whatever tends to replace personal feeling by tenacious communion with the universe, seemed to me bene-

ficial to that energy because it is increased by use. Yes; I do believe in the self-sacrifice of the soul that forgets itself, and in the virtue of that self-sacrifice. I believe in the heart that surrenders itself to a cause greater than itself and accepts the consequences of that surrender. I believe in the good of useless sacrifice, and that such sacrifice lives for ever in a spiritual eternity. I believe that nothing good, nothing generous, nothing that has uplifted us or has, in some sort, invented any moral beauty, can wholly die. I even believe that in this, if God does not exist, lies our chance of gaining a soul, and that we ourselves create the soul which we did not perhaps receive from Destiny. Yet I dread, I am terrified by the idea of the catastrophe which threatens; I shudder at the thought of the conflagration which will give our souls the chance to save one another, but which, it may be, will consume us all."

"Oh, father, father, surely you see, now that we are on the eve of the supreme struggle, that your faith is not unlike my scepticism? You end where I began. For the first time we think and feel alike."

"No! no!" he answered at last in alarm, as if his thoughts, stripped of their wrappings, suddenly terrified him. "No, not one of my beliefs breaks down because of this threat. I do not reject one of them. I still have faith in all my convictions, but I am filled with anguish. I, who sought to make my creed a living thing, am but a man after all, burdened with all the sorrows, weaknesses and anxieties of man. What is going to happen? What nations will rise against each other? Which of us are to die? For, mark you, my boy, if to-morrow what we have dreaded so much comes to pass, that

will be the end of all things as they are now. It is true that the nation will emerge strengthened by the very evil that will not have entirely slain it. Individual sorrows will disappear; personality will cease to exist. It will be the rule of the masses, of the soul of the whole of the masses. These are our last personal days.

"This may be our last evening together in all the ages. Never again, perhaps, shall you and I be together like this, in this big armchair, the fire blazing before us, looking as if it were trying to console us like a meditative ancestor."

He pressed me to his heart in a passion of tenderness. I felt his tears on my cheeks.

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So it had needed the menace of universal carnage to draw our hearts together again. It had needed death, as a brief red prelude, to cause our hearts to beat in unison. We remained together, close to each other, lulled by the waning fire, in which it seemed there was being consumed a fragment of eternity. To-morrow there might be I know not what: a new dawn, a new universe, a hell born of itself, wherein there would be no place for our mutual love. But for that night we were together—and one.

To-morrow, father, your beliefs will draw you from me again, will immobilise you in involuntary coldness. To-morrow you will be unable to grasp my way of looking at life; to-morrow there will come between us that outer world which ought never to be allowed to influence the heart. To-night there were just you and I—and the crackling of the fire,

the song of the eternal phoenix rising from its own ashes.

Yes, to-morrow, father, you will be able to live and die far from me ; to-morrow life will erect insurmountable barriers. This evening, our souls, so utterly unlike, have communed with each other more closely than any kindred souls on earth. To-morrow, standing face to face, mastered once more by our beliefs, we shall be two adversaries who cannot be reconciled even by a long past of common memories ; to-morrow, I shall be kept from being with you even at the most supreme moments. Yet to-night we have been more blent, there has been more sublime nearness, more tenderness between us than between you and those who surround you, guarding you as base sentries do a forbidden treasure. To-night—did you know it, father ?—I have been more your son and you have been more my father than any other father to his son, any other son to his father.

Come what may, nothing can rob me of that supreme sensation. I shall disappear in the shadows that will soon swallow me up sanctified by the memory of that prophetic July night when we kissed for the last time . . .

V

September 14.

In the immense host of ages, no day is kin to another ; each is a different soldier fighting for himself, born and dying within his own limits, slain in front of the regiment of his own hours . . .

No two days are alike, any more than are any two human beings. The night on which we wept together, my father and I, in perfect communion of feeling, is dead, inscribed in the past, but no other night of all those that shall yet descend on this earth, will ever resemble it.

Nor shall we two ever weep again as we wept then. Tears will be shed, tears of the same nature, sons will be pressed to their fathers' breasts, wondrous reconciliations of souls, as moving as the meeting of stars, but never can there be tears like our tears of that night.

Let us be proud of our unique emotions, for they are all we own. Let us be proud that at times from our dulled eyes tears fall, the taste of which cannot be matched in all eternity.

My father and I had parted late that night, affectionately, mournfully, as if we were watching by a corpse that was not there, the incarnation of all the young men who were so soon to die.

It was late before I fell asleep, but I did not dream. What dreams could I have had? My soul drove them away as it might vain arabesques. What could the vivid, erratic imaginings of the night have conceived that could have been more surprising than the happenings of the day? But in the morning when I woke in the room full of childhood's memories, it all came back to me in a flash—last night's dinner, Stephane Savage's voice, the death of Jaurès, my return home, my father.

My first impulse was irresistible. Borne away from each other to opposite poles of thought, my father and I had become reconciled last night. It had happened, that strange, that amazing thing, more impassioned than any lover's reconciliations, that thing which his friends had striven so hard to prevent, which Stephane had forbidden, fearing thereby to lose his influence over me. Yes, my father and I were reconciled, we two between whom the world sought to create abysses because it felt we were so unique that we could dispense with the rest of the world. We two, my father and I, had wept in each other's arms! I had laid my head on his shoulder, and without anyone to see us, without any Princesse Olkonsky, without any of those intimate friends who seem like judges ever ready to condemn, we had been for hours just two beings for whom all the past, all beliefs, all prejudices, the world itself, did not exist, for we had found ourselves each one in the heart of the other.

How I longed that morning to cry aloud to everything round me, to the lacquered screen, to the table, to the mirror: I am reconciled to my father, there is nothing to separate my father and me, we are re-

conciled, and I love him—has he ever guessed how much? I know I have never sacrificed any of the desires of my unbridled soul to his wishes, that I have never known how to renounce for him that in me which in its frenzy makes me what I am, but has he ever suspected how a disturbed look on his face tortured me to the very depths of my being when I reflected that I was not what he wished me to be? I have never echoed the words that flowed from his soul; I could not do so because the star of independence that burned within me forbade my dwelling within the light of another. But did he ever know how much the thought of him haunted me, how his words lived in me? Has he ever thought that, till I draw my last breath, anything that is good in me will own him as its source? Did he know that I got up joyous, joyous, that sunny July morning, in spite of all that I foresaw close at hand, because I believed that nothing could ever separate us again?

My first impulse was to hasten to him. I dressed in a hurry. I seemed to be another being. As soon as I was ready, I hastened down and knocked at his door. I understood that I might enter on hearing a voice that was not his, a voice that answered me, a voice I knew.

Why is it, father, that every time I have gone to you, the voice that bade me enter was not yours? Why are there always others' wills between our thoughts, replies of strangers between us?

I came into the room of last night. Could it possibly be the same? Do rooms share so strongly, or so slightly, our feelings? Why did this one, the moment I entered it, this one which had been so

bright in the grief of last night, seem so oppressive? Father, father, are we not to continue loving each other? Shall we never recover those moments?

My father was seated at his desk. He appeared to be writing, and did not look round at once. Scattered round him were newspapers, letters, and the telephone-messages that had just been brought to him.

My grandmother was there in a travelling-dress, a dress, however, that was still formal mourning. She was standing by the mantelpiece; it was she who had said "Come in." It was her voice which had permitted me to come to her son. Upright, in her black dress, she looked like some insolent sentry resuming guard over him. I drew near: she gazed intently at me as she alone knows how to gaze. One glance sufficed to show that she disapproved of me, and she seemed to dismiss me yet more completely from her mind as she lightly kissed my brow.

Whence had she come? But yesterday she was in the country, at Aigues-Mortes, with Peronne, and no notice of her return had been received. Yet there she was, as she has been ever since, in the grey light of the morning.

"I arrived at seven with Peronne"—my grandmother's trains always manage to arrive at seven. "In the country things look black, rumours of war everywhere. It also occurred to me that your father might need me. So here I am."

"Here I am . . ." She uttered those words as if, in very truth, the fact must make us feel happier; as if things would change the minute she arrived.

"I telephoned this morning to Sophy and

Corisande"—her two daughters—"their husbands will go at once."

Matters were then so near a crisis! Our emotion of last night had befogged my mind. I had foreseen all that was happening, but as I gazed upon that withered woman in black, who had come up from the country and was quite at her ease in this new realm of death which she seemed to inaugurate, I knew what had happened.

"Their husbands will go at once."

At once meant to-morrow, to-day, perhaps this very moment.

"As for you, you are too young yet," she said in a tone of annoyance and regret, and quite as if she were stripping me of an honour.

My father looked round; I hated the space which separated us, and which my grandmother seemed to fill with an oppressive atmosphere wholly her own. She now began to finger her beads which she had taken from her bag or from her handkerchief with the mourning border. They suddenly shone in her hands like a sombre necklace in which the golden medals formed pauses between the prayers. And as she talked she was telling them.

She spoke calmly of the excitement in the country, of the tocsin to be rung the very instant mobilisation was announced, of how she had hurried back to Paris directly she found war so near, and of her difficulty in finding a suitable compartment for Peronne and herself in those overcrowded trains rushing towards Paris like the blood of France flowing back to its heart.

She described her journey when it was impossible to get a sleeping-car. These, however, she never

took at any time. She had a horror of them as if they were some indecent modern invention of the devil: "Just imagine little beds like those swung down for people who undress in the trains!" Yet, all of a sudden, she had wanted what she could not get; wanted those sleeping-cars as soon as they were not to be had.

She referred to her absurd companions *en route*. There was a woman who had travelled with them from Aigues-Mortes to Paris, quite a common sort of person, she said, who gave way to her feelings just as if she were alone, weeping continuously on the shoulder of her son, a lad of twenty. He would most probably be called up at once, the very first day, without giving her time to get accustomed to his going, supposing you ever do get accustomed to seeing those that are all your life go to their death. The woman had wept all night; it was impossible to sleep because of her sobbing; the whole night long without a minute's pause.

She told of her arrival at the crowded station in Paris, a station which seemed already aware that it was going to be one of the Gates of Death, one of the arches under which each would have to pass in order to become a slaughterer or a victim.

I do not mean to say that my grandmother used just these expressions: I read them in her dry, callous words, in her brief sarcastic descriptions, while the beads of her chaplet slipped through her pale fingers, and mechanically every prayer punctuated the paragraphs of her talk.

I am sure she did not hate war. What did it matter to her, that vast epidemic of death, since death meant nothing to her? Apart from my father, who was

too old to serve, were not all her sons dead? And were not her other children daughters?

Suppose other people's sons were slain, it would not matter. Besides, a mighty blood-letting could not hurt this crazy nation in which people seemed to have lost the little sense left to them by the Revolution. Further, had she not beheld, with those same grey eyes of hers, those hard imperious eyes from which no tears could flow, other wars, had she not continually seen wars? Was it not necessary that there should eternally be wars in virtue of the traditions of our race, of our family? Of course, there always would be wars!

And war, like baptism and extreme unction, was itself a unique sacrament.

Such were her thoughts in those last days of life, dark sentinel standing by the fire of the guns! The beads of the chaplet slipped between her fingers, and she muttered the name of God (a mere word deprived of all meaning by perpetual piety) without ever turning to Him in prayer.

Yes, at that very moment when even unbelievers raised their eyes to a heaven which they knew to be void, rigid in her own self-righteousness, my grandmother asked nothing additional from the God who obeyed her. She mumbled the same daily prayers; she who called herself a believer uttered no cry of supplication to the God whom she believed omnipotent, imploring him to stay the war.

I came forward. I was now near my father. But what had become of his eyes? I had felt the glance of his eyes last night. His eyes of this morning held nothing for me. Some power greater than himself appeared to enslave him anew. I dared not even

kiss him on the forehead, that forehead within which his splendid thoughts crowded before they spread over the world.

Why stretch out my arms, why weep? He was not the same man. Nothing had happened, yet I—I did not recognise him. I longed to beseech, to cry out to him, for I felt the abyss was opening again between us, that a single moment had swept away all that had passed . . . I felt, during that hellish instant, that henceforth we were to be strangers to each other.

Oh! If only you knew what I suffered that morning, and how I felt that I was an orphan!

So I drew back. I had approached him more spontaneously, more lovingly than a son in the presence of the being who created him; I had come to him as one goes to the friend he loves best in this short span of life. And nothing was left of what I had hoped for! Nothing whatever of the dear, sublime intimacy of the day before, of that divine union of our hearts.

Last night, we had spoken, we had been silent, we had exchanged glances serious and solemn, but of that nothing was left. This morning I dreaded the words that would be uttered; I knew that carnage had already given him the soul pertaining to it, and that the humanity in him was stunned.

It was as through a mist that I heard his voice saying that war would probably be declared tomorrow; that Lermanceau had just telephoned to him from the Ministry. The name of Jaurès was no longer heard; probably he himself was not thinking of him. Peace was now a thing of the past. Heroic glory was in anticipation poisoning minds.

. . . So I withdrew and went away ; went away, without a word, not knowing why I went. Ah ! it was to cease to be there, confronted by those beloved features, facing that noble brow, that glance which made me feel lost. It was to get away from him who had given me life without giving me any reason to live.

VI

On the stairs near the door, I met the Princesse Olkonsky. She looked somewhat jaded, slyly amused, as if she were trembling with an emotion that seemed unreal. She was in every way incredible; everything about her was so little in accord with the circumstances of the time that it was impossible for any sensible onlooker not to assume that she had dressed for some exceptional fancy-dress ball, to which she had come early in order to get used to her costume.

She was dressed that morning, our greatest musician, with a sort of costly simplicity that made her look like a gipsy in a fairy-tale and an empress in a ballet. A tiger-skin hat was cocked in military fashion over her aquiline features; but the two yellow eyes in which her genius seemed to dwell made one forget the tiger-skin hat and quaint clothes that had all been put on, apparently, in a mad fit of somnambulism. It was impossible to recollect any detail of her costume, or even to remember it as a whole. There was blue and green and red in it, several kinds of fur, and two or three varieties of feathers. One felt almost grateful to her two dainty little feet for having similar shoes on each, for it seemed only natural for the one to have been shod with Sappho's sandal and the other with a slipper worn by a Badroulboudour.

She appeared surprised to see me there at that hour.

"I have been with my father," I said somewhat haughtily, and laying stress on the "my." "We spent last evening together."

I meant her to see that if she was worthy to be the recipient of his confidences, I was worthy to have him weep on my shoulder.

"He was upset last night, very much upset when he left me," she went on. "Death and also the sensation of glory is in the air! . . . One feels different this morning; the moment, air, light, liberty, appear to be threatened; one feels French"—she dwelt strongly on the words. "Words themselves sound sweeter, as though the language were itself in danger. What a magnificent awakening of national patriotism! This morning as I came along, I could have hugged the chesnut-trees of Paris to my heart."

I did not reply. So she also was moved, she who ought to have loved Beauty, she who had made music sing, mighty music, like a bond of union between the nations.

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Well, let her go upstairs, and she can talk to those who will understand her . . . I do not remember what I said to her; all I know is that I went off. I was soon downstairs in the bracing air of morning. Never had a lovelier day shone on the little garden in the deserted street; a secluded, peaceful garden, not showy, but singularly sweet and pure. The lawn had just been mown; there were roses in a clump of shrubbery; the gardener was whetting his scythe. But for the servants eagerly grouped

round the papers, it would have been like any ordinary bright July morning.

Where should I go? Where would I find men who shared my views, men who in that monstrous dawn were unmoved by any heroic exaltation, any sanguinary delight, who would never see anything fine in the declaration made by forty millions of men to another forty millions that they had decided to slay them?

Where, at this dread moment, should I find men to whom all this old talk of revenge, of blood to be poured out, of expiation, of misunderstood honour would be but as out-of-date currency?

No member of my family or of my country shared my beliefs in these matters. Where find beings that morning who were so profoundly wretched at the thought of war that they could dash their brains out against a wall? Where find men courageous enough to admit that there is nothing sublime in war, who, seeing regimental colours pass by, have so risen above their own limitations, so completely cut off conventional shackles that they see in the flag only a sordid, blood-sodden rag, and believe that those who lay down their lives for it should never be forgiven, in spite of the café-keeper shouting that we shall beat the enemy, the little butcher at the corner, with his curly hair, turning up his sleeves as he smiles at the thought of the licking the foe is going to get, in spite of the dominating mentality of the boxing-ring and the military academy?

Where are those who, like me, feel themselves lonely on such a day in the midst of the nameless multitude, of the universal lack of understanding, in the centre of the furnace of nations? Those who,

with me, will look up at the old sun, weary of rising daily, and say :

“ O Sun, men are going to kill each other in your presence.

“ O Sun, once again, men, barbarous as ever, are entering upon a barren conflict. The hideous adventure will be disguised with ideals, masked with the seeming magnificence of a crusade, but it will be the same old ghastly adventure, the same hard labour of courage, the same penitentiary in the open under Europe’s civilised heavens, the same unslaked thirst for blood and war-madness, the same heroic and spurious trickery which masters all humanity.

“ In your splendour, Light of day, the men of this generation, in whom the soul of nascent Beauty seemed to be slowly returning, are harking back to their ancient traditions of massacre. They will rob each other of the one thing they really possess—Life, touching, inexplicable, irrecoverable Life. Ignorant of the treasures concealed in it, they are about to smite irreplaceable flesh. Youthful geniuses will murder other youthful geniuses.

“ Clear-eyed young Goths, in whose souls dwell all the Fausts of the future, will destroy our young Cheniers and our budding Pascals. Mind shall shoot down imagination, Metaphysics destroy Music. Everywhere, in those hearts of twenty, in those hearts still unknowing what light they bear in themselves, the harmonies of the future shall be destroyed by bayonets.

“ What will remain of Beauty, the deity whose temple ought to stand unmoved? For what of it can be saved from that ocean of blood?

“ O Sun, thou that shalt give light to these things,

that shall judge them from the height of thy mighty, mobile silence, who shall behold rare beings hurled against each other and become cold corpses, thou, everlasting golden-nurse of battle-fields, who shalt perchance alone know all that has disappeared with those youths who fall, all that was in them that has been suppressed, destroyed, lost, all the masterpieces that will never be brought to birth, before thee, O Light, I swear this solemn oath :

“ No matter what happens, no matter what to-morrow may bring forth or what hatred and contempt I may have to endure, I swear an oath to thee, O Light !

“ In spite of my father’s soul, infinitely pure and candid, that will continue to cherish its illusions, that will gaze upon the fluttering standard and not hear the cries of those who are rotting ere they die, that will only see the ecstasy on the faces of those who charge through flower-filled meadows, ignoring the hideous tombs of innocent youth ; in spite of those who search for and exploit glory ; in spite of the great, ambitious minds that will build for themselves out of the bloody bodies an arch of prosperity from which they will drive the doves, in spite of all those who will try to make of war something beautiful, useful and necessary—I swear before you, O Light, to keep this same horror of all that is to come, I swear to die rather than to abandon a shadow of my revolt, I swear to you, were I to be alone on the isolated rock of my insulted youth, to continue to curse all the age-old pretexts in the name of which men slaughter each other ! ”

VII

Salvitat et Placuit (*Epitaph of young Septentrion*).

September 15.

And that night I went to the ball.

I danced, knowing that men were going to die.

I realised the tragedy that was imminent, and went to dance at the last ball given before death reigned.

Curious, the frivolity that mingled with the deepest of revolts in my bewildered mind! Those who saw me that night could never have imagined the cry I uttered to the sun that was so soon to see multitudes perish.

I will not represent myself as nobler than I am. This book is not an apotheosis. This book is a conflagration. It must be like the pyre on which Sardanapalus burned everything, the imperial crowns, the rare wood of his throne, the women who had fed his loves, the very dignity of his soul.

This book is not an apology. It does not grovel at the feet of anyone, imploring forgiveness. It beseeches no sovereign, no divinity, no power. It is but a mighty general protest, a vast indictment of everything, of the universe, of myself.

Let him who would dare write down the contradictory states of his soul and re-read his work without terror, cast the first stone at me. I shall pick

it up and hurl it back at his face, and mark him eternally.

It is not a pretty thing, the human soul, not even our own. There are no two sides alike in it, no two hold together. On the one hand, the highest aspirations, on the other the vilest earthly tendencies. Here, a sort of wing seeking to take shape. There, a star bent on shining in every brook. Here something endowed with every impulse to rise to the skies. There, abysses . . .

Who will tell me whether I am a monster or a precursor? The ephemeral god of this worn-out age or the prophet of an era about to be born? Who shall tell me whether I am the last of my race, the supreme egoist of a composite heredity, or the first of a coming humanity, the first of a race which shall soon appear in this world armed with my beliefs, aroused to new ventures, to new horizons, to a new morality?

I have not handed on the torch. I shall not hand it on. I will not create a man or a woman in my own image. I refuse to impart my nostalgia and my languor to any living being formed in my likeness, and who might prove to be my enemy; a being whose thoughts remained secret from me behind his familiar look . . .

I will not create what might be a great precipice over which I should bend till my soul was dizzy. I failed to understand my father, and he cannot have understood his son. Every being is more solitary when he endeavours not to be so, than when he resigns himself to solitude. I refuse to give life, just as I refuse to cause death. I will neither be the direct assassin who watches the blood of his victim flow,

or that prolonged assassin who may die ere his crime is fully accomplished.

Ever since this world was a world, men have killed each other, and those who give us life also bestow death upon us. Our first murderers are those two beings who, in a moment of passion, have determined the beginning of our existence, of our heart. They were not aware of it. They did not believe it. They would have laughed if, as they looked upon the babe in its cradle, a fragile despot, they had been told they had slain a man . . .

Can it be that I, who have disdained to be a creator, have been only a destroyer? Have I not perchance begun something while resolved to perpetuate nothing? Have I built up nothing simply because my imperious mind has crushed to powder the false gems of current morality? Have I merely added ashes to ashes? No, I cannot admit that.

Am I no more than an egoist? No; for this morning I trembled because of a belief, of a danger that did not threaten me. Can it be that this hatred of war is after all but disguised cowardice? No; for I was not thinking of myself.

When I invoked the sun to witness what was about to happen, say what you will, I laid the foundations of a coming hope. I was an Archangel announcing a new Holy Birth.

If that be so, why did I go to that ball? Where did I find the heart, the strength, the insolence that took me to that ball, the strange pride I felt in showing myself there? What mysterious protest did I think I was making? Find out, search within yourself, wretched and complex creature, compounded of

every sort of contradiction ; search, O soul, prey to all the emotions of empty pleasure !

Was it bravado that took me there, the resolve to show unmistakably that I did not share the universal feeling, that I was not of those who were then praying before a flag ? Or was it that I cared nothing for all the nations that were rushing to ruin ? Let them rush to it, since they want to do so. Was it boredom, just boredom, that sent me to it ? There are not many places to which a man can go on the eve of great catastrophes when his heart does not beat in unison with that of the mass. You who reproached me with having gone to that funereal amusement, have you the least idea of my secret anguish as I danced ? Was I really indifferent because I did not spend the evening with my family—the family that understood me so well ? Was I necessarily a monster because I danced that night ?

When I left the Princesse Olkonsky, I found myself in the street, wretched and alone. I have described the loneliness I felt in that mental solitude. I ordered the car and told the man to drive to Stephane's place. I had parted abruptly from him the night before at the Café de Paris. I owed him an apology ; besides, I felt the need of talking with him, of noting, in his dangerous intellect, the effect of the present hour.

The car was travelling through Paris, past houses bathed in sunshine. And everywhere groups of people, groups on the platforms like the groups in the gardens, endless little groups anxiously crowding round the newspapers as round a doctor giving his verdict.

At the corner of the Avenue des Champs-Élysées

and the Place de la Concorde, the chauffeur pulled up abruptly without asking my permission, snatched rather than took from a newsman a noonday paper, and rapidly read the headlines as one reads the bulletin concerning some dear sick one. Then he handed me the paper through the glass that I had caused to be lowered as being a needless mirror.

I made a sign to him that I did not want it. I felt that the die was cast. An hour more or less—the dread event was on its way, it was impending, nothing could stop it. And who would try to stop it? What nation was there that in its heart of hearts detested murder violently enough to make the effort? Which nation was not prepared with excuses for becoming at once victim and would-be saviour? The man who had detested war had died the night before.

Appear then, O War, to the nations that deserve thee! Would there still be barracks if people detested war? Or generals, if people detested war? Or a palace in a garden down the rue Saint Dominique, bearing its name and smelling of shells and dust?

The Arc de Triomphe at the top of the avenue is a huge maw open wide in hope of heroes yet to come. On its walls are names of Victories . . .

Come, then, War, to the people that still writes on its triumphal arches the dates when blood flowed: such a people detests thee not.

Once I loved to see that arch as I passed it on returning from the Bois de Boulogne. On mornings when I was riding home, I have seen you as if upborne on light, vaporous mists . . . Seen from the Porte Dauphine, you rose like a Greek arcade, with an exquisitely pale sky showing through . . . From

afar there was nothing of war about you ; you ceased to be a monument built on military glory out of the solid rock. You were a grey shape, a modern Acropolis, a boundary stone whose shadow has witnessed many ephemeral loves.

You were like a low cloud melting into the horizon—seen first by other eyes than mine. One must pass through your shade to go to the Bois, to breathe in the loveliness of the vast garden cast round Paris like a cool scarf, the lake with its tame swans, the roses at Bagatelle, the tiny, sunny cemetery where Guimard is buried, over which still hovers, at night, a dancer's whirling soul, sweet cemetery, so solitary, unknowingly consecrated for one person alone, where Parisian lovers may, as they do in Italian towns, cast kisses on the tomb.

If you were merely a brutal memory of bellicose virtues, you would weigh heavily on our souls. The star-named space round you could not breathe unless you were destroyed : you would stifle garden and avenue together.

But you are something else : I drag you ironically from your first purpose, for monuments forget the original meaning attached to their stones, and the meditative Cairene women sometimes sit on the coffins of their ancient kings.

Let a Rouget de l'Isle sleep in the Invalides, next to Bonaparte : it is his proper place. Let them place next the hero who made men kill, the singer to whose strains men went to slaughter. And if, on Sundays, people bend over those fonts of boredom whence naught emerges but the patter of the guardian, what is that to me ?

You no longer belong to the victories recorded on

your stones, to the soldiers who march beneath you : your part is at once more profound, more painful, more solemn.

Since you first showed in the evening light, mighty Silhouette, softened by the twilight mists that shroud your stones, I think of the eyes that have beheld you. Lamartine, as he strolled with his dogs, noted, with his clear glance, your darkened form . . . Musset himself may have caught a glimpse of you . . . and the sweet Castiglione, bewildered by her own beauty, as she drove through the square at evening in her carriage lined with white satin . . .

You are the cynosure of all eyes, Arc de Triomphe ; the ultimate altar where I can recover something of the eyes, now closed for ever, that have looked upon you, and on which I gaze eagerly with mine, so that the men of to-morrow, of after to-morrow, of all times, may discover there, like a pulsing star, the thrilling glance I cast on you to-day !

VIII

September 16.

The car stopped at Stephane's quarters in the avenue Henri-Martin.

He expected me. He thought I would come to see him.

"I did not know where to find you," he said; "you left me pretty coolly last night."

"I was at home; you could have telephoned," I retorted.

"Could I?" He cast an ironic look upon me. "I fancy your father does not much care to have me telephone to you at his house."

His features had that sharp look which makes him appear heartless; I had never seen it so plainly.

It seemed to me at that moment that he was playing a part, this man whose ideas I had at a certain period of my life shared, my Teacher of Life, whose mind had reflected my own, and had been at once a revelation of and a reply to it. In the crude light of life, it struck me for the first time that there was about him something icy, frozen, insensible, and I began to wonder whether the doctrine he taught was not merely the manifestation of his character.

"You will remain for luncheon, won't you? Indeed you must."

I had no reason to refuse. I felt that there had

sprung up between him and me a secret misunderstanding, as between my father and myself, but of a different sort. Our ideas were almost all alike, and it was only in the depths of his being, at their very fount, that I conceived there was something alien from my beliefs.

I dare say he was thinking the same thing, but not moved by the same motives. Must I, then, be always alone? Alone before those who have created me because I think differently from them, alone before him whom I have chosen for master because I doubt the genuineness of his teaching?

"Well, so it has come," he said. "It is war . . . And, by the way, my dear fellow, of course you are coming to the ball all the same, to-night, at Winnie de Polastron's? You really must."

He said it coolly, with the imperturbability he had made a law to himself, and which forbade him to be surprised at his own ideas.

"I have not given it a thought," I confessed quietly. "I supposed that in view of what is happening Madame de Polastron would cancel the ball."

"You did, did you? . . . Well, don't worry, my dear fellow, she is not such a fool. Why, she can think of nothing but her ball; it is to be the last of the season, the most splendid, and, of course, the most tragic, the ball at which a whole civilisation, all the delight of life, will be entombed to the strains of the finest gipsy orchestra. Why, everybody will be there!"

"You must be crazy, Stephane. You surely do not suppose that this evening, with the dreadful news . . ."

"I tell you, my dear fellow," he continued phleg-

matically, as he selected a cigarette from my agate case which I had laid on the table, "that everyone will be there. I am certain that not a single prominent member of Parisian society will be absent. Everybody who is smart will put in an appearance. And you will never get me to believe that you, the young god of this dying civilisation, in whom an expiring epoch sees, in a way, a symbol of itself, will refuse to go, just as if you were a middle-class woman busily preparing for her son the kit he will have to take to the war."

Stephane was leaning against the mantelpiece in his customary attitude, one hand thrust in his waistcoat. The light showed up the details of his face. Never had I been so struck by the cynicism and brutality in his physical appearance, and in my thought I compared him unfavourably with my father.

I recalled my father's face the night before, clouded by our misunderstanding, but splendid in its nobility, the recurring hardness on it seeming involuntary; I thought of his lofty brow that seemed to impart solemnity to all around him; of his features which appeared to reveal the soul. Unquestionably there was in my father's beliefs that which terrified me, which I neither admit nor suffer; I did not believe in the ideal he had set up for himself, and no striving on my part, however resolute, could make me accept it. But there was in Stephane's face an expression I did not like. It seemed to me to lower the value of his beliefs, his paradoxes, his very intellect. These struck me now as the working of an unbridled mind, and not as the intimate outpourings of a full soul.

No matter in which direction I turned, nor to what master I applied, to what leader I looked for a rule

of life, I always relapsed into my solitude. At critical moments, souls like mine are always alone.

I had no desire to hear the war welcomed, to see my father's face light up at the prospect of coming butchery. I did not want to hear the Princesse Olkonsky protest, with her Czecho-Slav accent, that she would like to "hug the chesnut-trees of Paris to her heart." But Stephane Savage's tone also aroused opposition in me. There are moments when pleasantries taste like tears.

In every way that ball seemed to me to be impossible. The name I bore, my position in society, the glorious fame of my father's genius, to which I had perhaps not given sufficient thought, combined to give to my actions an importance I could not hide from myself. A mere intellectual like Stephane Savage might do what he pleased, but I could not commit an act so damaging to the name I bore, so opposed to the ideas associated with it.

That was the first feeling that flashed through my mind. But Stephane was there, and I was accustomed to yield to his influence. I will not admit that he ruled me, for my nature, compounded as it was of impulse and indolence, could brook no master. A strong mind might appear to have tamed me: yet it could not subject me to itself . . . I seemed to be at the mercy of whatever came along . . . but successively, as a woman is faithful in turns to the lovers that she constantly takes up and discards.

That in me which had just been overpowered would disappear like the hues of the rainbow, and the new tint that arose escaped the influence dominating its predecessors. There were too many different

selves in me, too great a variety of youths, alike yet different, ever to allow the mind of a master to subject them all. So escaped young Alcibiades, to make use of an expression of Stephane's in the days of my adolescence, by the very diversity of his personality, the influence of Socrates.

Since souls were first created and were bent on intense self-analysis, no one, indeed, could have been more indifferent and yet more impressionable than I. In the course of a single day, nay, of an hour, of a few minutes, the thing which had deeply moved me ceased to interest me. I could think of something without the least emotion; a moment before, it would have forced a cry from me. I passed instantaneously from absolute morbid sensibility to complete intellectual insensibility . . .

I have often thought that this diversity of feeling, this varying sensibility, was a gift. Many have told me so, many declared it my greatest, perhaps my most perplexing charm. I no longer think so. I am simply of opinion that it was only the most disabling of weaknesses, the unconscious penalty for a bemused soul. I believe that a powerful intellect, such as my father's, brilliantly clear and well-poised, radiant and reassuring, could have cured this malady of my inner self had I been able to come to an understanding with him. I repeat that it was not Stephane's influence, but a sudden change in my soul since I entered the room. The rainbow had no longer the hue of the moment before.

I no longer felt any of the exaltation in which I had recovered what my father would have termed my "nobility of soul." Such exaltation had been but

temporary; I could not keep at that higher level, where I seemed to soar above myself.

My father and I had been drawn together by a common anguish. Both of us, after that brief emotion, had gone back to our every-day attitude of mind. He returned to his heroic illusion, just as I fell back into my universal scepticism. And that was the end of it.

Where was it that I read that magnificent passage of Emerson on the sustaining power of sorrow, in which, standing by his dead son, the very violence of his grief bound him closer to life? To minds like mine suffering is a fearful distraction which keeps them occupied. One evening, one morning, and the sorrow disseminated in the air had lifted me out of myself. Life had made me suffer, and almost sufficed to reassure me about life. In a pathetic variant of Pascal's phrase, I had been able to exclaim, "I suffer, therefore I am."

I had suffered, and forgotten in an instant all the disenchantment that formed the very basis of my character; and then, suddenly, it mastered me once more. The void appeared only the more absolute, the universe all the more empty and the more non-existent because, for a few hours, the suffering I experienced had drawn me above it, as an eagle's soaring pinions carry it far above the precipice.

Then, unexpectedly, in these surroundings—not because of Stephane's influence at all: I insist on this—in consequence of the inability of my soul to maintain itself for any length of time above circumambient influences because of this tendency continually to fall back into its own realm of the previous day, I experienced the same sense of disenchantment,

the same anguish that had always gripped me and which had constituted the foundations of my inner life, if one may use so solid and immobile a term in speaking of so restless a thing—that woeful inner life round which the orb of my existence revolves and is slowly devoured.

Yes, suddenly I fell back into the void I had temporarily forgotten. I would have cried out in the pain of that surprise had I dared do so, but Stephane's cynical glance, as cold and stern in its way as my grandmother's faith, forbade me to show any feeling.

In a flash I realised the futility of everything.

A great man had died, war was about to break out, the youth of France would be slaughtered . . . What did all that matter?

Had we not all to die some day, die wholly? Not even those could escape who had thought themselves most useful. Let them slay each other since they wished it; they can only slay those who will eventually die in any case. I said a moment ago that living men were about to smite living men and I wept about it! Bah! It can be no more than a collision of phantoms.

Wars, political parties, national frontiers, laws and prejudices are, all of them, nothing more than lugubrious amusements. People prefer being subject to these wretched conventions rather than face one another openly. If credulous men did not make themselves drunk on lies, they would destroy themselves, not others.

Let them, then, go on disguising vacuity with their mountebank ideas . . . I will bow down to none of their errors; I shall never manage to believe their

truths. What is left me then ? Suicide ? Already ? Or pleasure, that form of frenzy, of forgetfulness, that vibrant morphia I use as a remedy, which soothes me and gives me a little sleep . . .

“ All right, Stephane, I shall go and dance . . . ”

IX

. . the first in beauty shall be first in might . . .
(KEATS : *Hyperion*.)

. . . Lui delle vesti e delle chiome il culto
E degli atti et dei passi, e i vani studi
Di cochi e di cavalli, e le frequenti
Sale, e le piazze romorose, e gli orti ;
Lui giochi e cene, e invitate danze
Tengon la notte e il giorno ; a lui dal labbro
Mai non si parte il riso ; ah ! ma nel petto,
Nel imo petto, grave, salda, immota
Come colonna adamantina, siede
Noia immortale . . .
(LÉOPARDI : *Al Conte Carol Pepoli*.)

September 27.

Yes, I shall go and dance ; I shall spend the night at Madame de Polastron's. I shall not yield to the sleep, waking from which I find myself face to face with the self I had temporarily forgotten. This night shall not be a mere rest between one day and the next. I will go to this final dance.

Stephane Savage had failed to read all my mind though he was only a couple of feet from me ; my thoughts had swung on their own way without his suspecting it. So he continued to urge me to go, while, having already resolved to do so, I pretended to hold back.

Luncheon was ready in the small dining-room opening out on the garden, a room filled with works of art, precious lacquers, all the things Stephane delighted in since I had taught him to like them.

We were waited on by a Japanese servant, whose noiseless movements he liked. Never had the man's yellow, shining face struck me as so foreign, so much of a mask, so entirely of a different world. Had it been a European who was waiting on us that day, he would have been shedding tears and asking us questions. And we would have had to answer him. But the lithe Jap, a living work of art from distant climes, probably had no knowledge of the overshadowing catastrophe, and nothing was changed in him, neither his doll-like automatic movements nor his ceremonious and rather troublesome politeness.

Luncheon over, Stephane took me into the library. There was a couch on which I lay down, exhausted by the agitation of the last few days. So for a moment, nay, for many moments, I remained there in the somewhat oppressive atmosphere of early afternoon, when a human being who has given too much to the radiant morning hours does not feel strong enough to work the day out. Thus I remained on the sofa, my eyes closed.

And Stephane went on talking :

"You will miss the biggest thing on earth," he said in his somewhat shrill voice. "Paris will shriek objections, but which part of Paris? How long have you been the sort of man to trouble about the opinions of a contemptible multitude that knows nothing of beauty? Is the opinion of the mob to prevail over our souls? Since when were you so eager to worship popular sentiment?"

"I have never known a more splendid idea for an entertainment. It has a tone of haughty arrogance that impresses like a bold challenge, this last ball before grim Death appears. It recalls to me, in some mysterious way, a big gun in an Italian garden, that of the Duchesse Grassioli. She had trained flowers round and over it, flowers of every kind, under which the deadly weapon completely disappeared. All one could see was a column that had apparently fallen and was now covered with flowers. It is the one and only gun that ever struck me as of any use, this flower-bearer on which a miracle had been worked. Think of it! The last dance before annihilation! Think of it, you who sought to be the youthful symbol of our age, you who came forward in a golden mist like Alcibiades surrounded by his dogs, like Antinous on the Egyptian stream when the lotus-gathering maids paled with jealousy at the sight of his beauty.

"A challenge, did I say? Yes, indeed, they will be a splendid challenge, those dances glowing as with the reflection of funeral pyres in which an epoch shall live for the last time, and a whole civilisation perish, And I have ever loved challenges. You, yourself, have you not indeed been the most remarkable. the most disconcerting of all? Have you not evoked from life's subtile lyre the strangest harmonies? Have you not invented new ways of startling our times?

"In truth you are the young deity of a civilisation that no longer loves its gods, but insults them; you are its deity, nevertheless. You are as touching as those figures in a ballet which appear but for an instant in the glare of the lights. You were proud of being superfluous and radiant like the things that surround

you. How, then, could you be absent from this ball to-night, you, the very incarnation of the supreme luxury of life? "

"The ball will never take place, Stephane," I cried.

"I tell you it will. Have you never looked at Madame de Polastron, and seen all the individualism and revolt in her? She resembles the Princesse Lamballe, whose head, borne on the end of a pike, still defied the mob and sneered at it the more insolently. Believe me, she is not one of those who would put off a ball because death is coming to the world. Have you never looked into her eyes? She is the frailest creature on earth, a crystal flower, but crystal does not bend. I am certain that if the whole world besought her not to give the ball, she would give it all the same. And if no one came to it, she would still order the gipsies to play, would set voluptuous music thrilling, and begin the unique concert. It would become a splendid entertainment given for herself, since she has made up her mind that it shall come off."

"It will not come off, Stephane."

"I tell you it will. And never at any time will such a ball have been given. Everything that is sumptuous and refined will mingle to make it a masterpiece: in fact, it has got to be one."

"The ball will not take place, Stephane."

"I tell you it will. I tell you that all the beauties, all the personages, all the flower of the land will sparkle there in their splendour; that which transcends life, that serene thing we name Beauty, will be there. It ought to be, for Beauty is about to die. And so, to-night, all must gather round swooning Beauty,

and swear never to forget her. That bewildered Sleeper, who cannot bear fighting and the shedding of blood, is about to close her eyes, so that she may not see these things, and those who deserve to live must come and swear to preserve her image intact in their hearts so long as she sleeps on earth. They must swear that when she wakes she will find them dreaming the dream that is broken to-day. All who have loved her, you, who above all have been her passionately-favoured lover, must be there to pledge to her your sacred faith, and comfort her at the instant when she is about to bid farewell to the world for a season."

"Why do you say these things, Stephane?"

"I did indeed once dream of being the youth you describe; why should I conceal the fact? Who, at seventeen, has not indulged in a similar dream? Who, in the environment in which he moved, has not mistaken the feelings of his youth for a prophecy of the future? Who, at seventeen, has not dreamed of a destiny beside which all others paled as unimportant stars? Who has not dreamed of becoming a splendid young charioteer taming the horses of the Sun, his head flung back in the fresh air of heaven? Who has not smiled at Alexander's fate, and said to himself: 'I shall do better than that!' Who has not said: 'They invented legends about themselves: I also will impose a legend on history!' Who has not dreamed anything and everything at seventeen?"

"You are right, Stephane. I was like that two years ago—are not two years terribly long, terribly short!—I have been the Marvel that steps into life and swears life has been made for him; swears that

everything, the soft shadows, the friendly cypress, the Borromean Isles, have all been created for his delight. Then everything seems so simple, so vivid. There is a season in life called first youth, in which everything appears like a wondrous trip aboard a steamer from which one beholds the distant isles. And every pleasure in life, every ambition resembles those isles of which we believe ourselves to be the first discoverers.

“Do you remember, Stephane, our first voyage together before I went to Oxford? It was then that you taught me the cities of Asia Minor, as you had taught me the verse of Mallarmé and Shelley, and had made me appreciate the curious charm of Gide and of Cyprus itself one morning of mist, of mingled delight and fear, just as, on another occasion, in the white room, that room at Aigues-Mortes with its urns and silence and Watteau ceilings, you revealed to me Shelley’s lines on the Magnetic Lady, sweeter than any other poetry in any other tongue. There is a season called first youth, when it is indeed good to have been born. Then, in return for some radiant mornings, a polo ground, a night pale with stars, one forgives those who have brought us into the world. Then, merely for the fact of being alive, everything is pardoned and given thanks for . . . everything, even Death.

“There is a season in life, Stephane, when, for the love of life, one pardons even Death . . . It was in that period of my life that you met me, and I remember it as well as if it were yesterday. Summer had not come to the land, but it was within me. It was like a golden power that issued from my hair, my glances, my young hands, so that sometimes

I thought I burned a flower merely by touching it.

"Stephane, how beautiful they were, the exaltations of that time! Do you remember our first meeting? I was as candid as the dawn, and in me was all the curiosity of primal man. I knew of no fetters, no obstacles, no bounds. Everything seemed possible to me.

"Do you fathom the dangerous magic in that expression: 'All seemed possible to me'? There were days when I could easily have believed I should never die, when the death of others afforded me no sufficient proof that I, too, must perish, when I thought myself so exceptional that I quite believed I was eternal.

"Do you remember that remark of Goethe's which you repeated to me one day when we were translating Faust? 'It is only because we consent to it that we die.' Well, I had adopted, assimilated, that thought; it had become part of myself; I could have inscribed it above my life-story as a recall to happiness. One only died because one consented to do so; let others do as they pleased, I would never consent. Since the gods had made me what I was, with radiant brow, youthful beauty, and a sort of glory and invincibility, it was because I was to remain so eternally. I would never consent to die.

"Glowing hedonism of that period of life! Youth, like mythology, invents legends, imperishable legends. Such was your pupil at that time, Stephane, a being to whom all things seemed possible. Could anything be more brilliant, more tragic, more pathetic? Happiness is such a painful thing that I could weep now at the thought of it. What greater fall

can there be than from the height of one's luminous pyramids?

"I must tell you all this. You must listen to it now. Do you realise the state of mind due to that imagination of mine? Were I to explain to anyone else, I should not be understood. No one but you could realise the heights of joy and the depths of suffering that accompany a temperament like mine. Men would recoil from it as from something super-human.

"When you were introduced to me, when my real life began, I was a marvellous youth who disbelieved in death. Oh, the dreams I dreamed! I planned my life like a sort of superhuman fairy-tale. I knew nothing of the world; my education had kept me from it, and maybe my soul more than my education. For in my soul was something that had the flutter of wings. Fortunate are those whose hearts have not thus palpitated, for then they do not suffer agonies when they feel them breaking. Happy those who enter on existence without hope or demands, who accept beforehand their share of the fatalities common to all. There is no place in this world for beings who have made for themselves a dazzling idea of life.

"Would I had died at that age! Would I had been struck down in mythological fashion in that Oxford where the does 'at eve mourn in Greek only, for they would then have been laid no mere corpse in my grave. Is it not so, comrades of those days? In the dust a fiery young statue would have burnt the stones of his tomb. I would have died calling out: 'Life is wonderful and beautiful!' and some, perhaps, would have believed it.

"But life came, Stephane, with its awakening. It always does come. It is here now . . .

"You taught me about the Universe just what I wanted to be taught. Among your dangerous words, beyond your paradoxes, I discerned what took my fancy. I concluded that the world was created for my benefit, its history but a figment of my memory, and that all I had to do was to give full sway to my sense of joy. And why should I not do so? My father told me pleasure was ugly, and sacrifice beautiful. How could I have thought pleasure not beautiful? . . . I, whose youth was so wonderful . . . So I led a life of pleasure.

"A Life of pleasure, Stephane, of joy, of happiness . . . a feverish life! Like young Phædon of Elis, violet-crowned, I have traversed my whole city striking on my bucklers and shouting: *Pleasure! Pleasure!* just as the Athenians shouted: *Patra! Patra!*

"No one could describe it all; no one could tell the tale of those who have loved me, nor give an idea of my delight. There have been moments in my life more gorgeous than those landscapes which Flaubert longed to press to his heart. Not a moment in my life when I was not full of joy. In every orgy I was the youthful leader. What a period of existence, Stephane! How glorious—and how brief! Never mind; it remains mine. Men will remember that I made of my youth a masterpiece which might have rejuvenated the earth, and that I expended on it all the gifts the gods had bestowed on me . . .

"And then, suddenly, there was nothing left. Suddenly, everything went! One day, just as one enters a desert, I stepped into real life. I woke,

I understood . . . I understood that there was no fairyland, that April was a myth, that the sun was but an unknown world round which the earth revolves, and the moon only a light that had gone out.

"All this I grasped instantaneously in the very midst of my enjoyment. Like Saint Paul on the road to Damascus who saw the figure of his God appear before him, I beheld the image of my own nothingness standing upright before me on the road of my voluptuousness.

"Do you remember the effect it produced upon me? I do not believe there was ever a clearer revelation. And however severely men may have condemned my past life, they must shudder at the thought of the pain I then felt. I do not see how I could live on after such an awakening. For at every moment I was aware of and weighed down by the knowledge of this new-found reality.

"And as my immoderate soul had soared up in the realms of joy, fine-spun and yielding as a jet of water in the summer heat, it now fell back over that precipice of terror.

"Do you suppose anyone else has passed through so fierce, so acute a trial? What is the precise nature of that hereditary blemish, that inexplicable horror of being alive, of being here? What is that dread, that inability to understand, that anguish that nothing but death can end?

"It was natural that I should strive to distract my mind.

"Speaking of Mallarmé, George Duhamel once remarked that 'he knew it was of no use to live, and that he did not seek to blind himself to the fact.'

And again: 'He is a model of heroic weakness: the example he sets enables men to spend their time nobly on this terrestrial plane which doubtless is the end of all.' "

" *Which doubtless is the end of all.*" Assuredly George Duhamel has written finer things, since he has written some pages in which this century will live, in which the sorrow of to-day will bear witness of itself to ages yet to come. Yet, I believe that no words have moved me more than this scrap of a sentence emerging like a spark of proud scepticism from a book of simple criticism. Like the poet of whom he speaks, George Duhamel has himself proved the emptiness of all things . . . but he lives, he judges, he accepts . . .

" Mine is not one of those solitary souls that are the stronger because they feel their own futility. I have never accepted my condition. From childhood, from my earliest days, the voice of revolt has ever murmured within me against all that is. The laws of life do not appear to me to be worth any more than man-made laws. And if I am not a great soul, neither am I a small soul. To that my torments, my dreams, my preoccupations bear witness. Anyone who has thought what I think, no matter what remedy he may have tried for his moral wretchedness, must be sanctified in his own eyes by the height of his meditations.

" Sometimes I think that, in spite of everything, I did possess a great and rare soul. It is not necessary that such souls should express themselves in acts; it is enough that they exist. But mine was a wandering one, a terrified one, for, after having had joy as a means of expression at the outset, it was unable,

afterwards, to impart to general actions the power of will it applied to despair.

"So I turned once more to pleasure. Nor do I know what could have prevented my doing so, what wisdom could have exerted a sufficiently sane influence upon my mental uneasiness. There is nothing of the Stoic about me.

"What I did in the rapture of my pagan youth I continued to do in the bitterness of my despair. Debauchery—I waved its black torch over my youthful years as I had waved it in my boyish intoxication at being alive. What reasoning could affect me? Pleasure and despair led to the same sybaritism. Thus I became what I am.

"I had loved pleasure because I looked upon it as a magnificent opportunity to express myself in my glorious youth. I turned to it again as a splendid narcotic, as the sick man turns to his phial of morphia, to the frail glass whence forgetfulness is distilled, drop by drop, with the scent of poppy. What harm did I do? I was only destroying myself. All men strive for happiness, no matter what their pre-occupations, and we are not to be judged by the kind of happiness we seek, for when all is said and done, happiness, like death, is ever the same . . .

"How could I, with that anguish racking my head, the victim of my own torturing incredulity, how could I have drawn to me Montaigne's soft pillow, and have slept quietly there? I needed something more in keeping with my temperament . . . 'a divan as deep as a grave.'

"So in sheer weariness I lived on. I suffered through weariness, loved through weariness, made

others suffer through weariness. Let much be forgiven me, Stephane, for I have greatly despaired.

"Whatever had been a source of exaltation for me became a mere distraction. I turned everything into a diversion so that I might not feel the hideous flight of time, the distance traversed each day towards death.

"You never suspected it, Stephane. You did not know that although I disbelieved in life, one hope did remain to me—my compassion for others. Why should I bear a grudge against human beings, irresponsible victims that they are? How could I entertain any rancour against them, prisoners in the same world, numberless Theseuses in a labyrinth of which they have not the clue?

"How can you expect pity for others from those who have no pity on themselves? I had suffered too cruelly from my own fate not to feel immense compassion for those fellow-victims of life. If they had only known, if they had only guessed how I pitied and felt for them all, how close they seemed to me, my companions in this atrocious adventure. I should have liked to be able to love them all, to have helped them to acquire all possible human happiness; I would I could have discovered for them some draught bestowing forgetfulness.

"O wretched beings, who have naught but life, how I longed to aid, to cure, to console you, to administer morphine to you! A cousin of mine was blamed for having taken it that she might give life, in order that her child might be born. I understand her well. And it is the same with living. How would it be possible to continue to exist unless we had some

moments of forgetfulness, if we did not lull our minds with dreams ?

" Yes, Stephane, having despaired of life, I looked with compassion upon the living, the innocent living.

" But now I despair of even them, for yesterday I beheld the outbreak of war. Yesterday I saw that they are all assassins, ready to murder each other, to snatch away from each other what they can never give back, the life that only working together in harmony can make bearable.

" And so I, who had dreamed of a fate as radiant as one of those of antiquity, the selfish and marvellous fate of Alcibiades, I who had hoped to be the Consoler of the ages and the Excuse for life, I am not that any more, Stephane ; I am only an unhappy child who weeps, and whose grief can never be soothed, for my grief springs from life itself . . . "

. . . Stephane looked at me through the twilight that had crept into the room. He seemed to be far, far away from this moral drama of mine, like Socrates on the violet mount, like Walter Pater in the garden of Oxford looking out on the Magdalen lawns that are filled with the scent of honeysuckle.

" You are a child," he said, laying his hand on my hair. " You are a child to talk like that. Life is the one and only thing against which no blasphemy must be uttered, and that no one must doubt. We must live because we live, and your beauty, your youth, and all else that is yours, make you one of the young apostles of life, one of the twelve pillars of its temple. You are the very last who ought to speak of life, for it can be and is beautiful. All depends on ourselves.

" Do you remember the day at Oxford when the

sunshine turned everything to gold, and the boats on the violet-tinted water broke the silence with the splash of oars; that day on which the sun seemed your crown? Can you deny that such a thing was? Remember, too, the magic of the poets, the intoxication of the musicians, the last act of *Tristan* at Bayreuth, the little Whistler at Cowes in the home of the Duchesse de Searley. Remember the opening scenes of a tragedy of Racine's. There are horrible things in life, but above and over them all is Beauty. Remember your own self: even war cannot prevent that. War is but an accident sweeping over the earth, while Beauty soars above it. Nothing can destroy Beauty, not war, nor death, any more than the blood which will flow to-morrow can alter the beauty of the ball to which you will go to-night: for you will come, will you not?"

The door concealed by the bookshelves suddenly opened, and the Jap entered. He came forward, bearing a lacquer salver on which lay a letter, addressed in fine, close handwriting, a handwriting I knew.

Stephane took the envelope from the salver.

"It is from Madame Polastron," I said, "you will see that she has cancelled her entertainment."

Stephane had opened it and handed it to me. I can see that letter now; I almost remember the words of it. No doubt a similar one was waiting for me at home. She begged Stephane to come, and added that, in order to spare some people having to say that they had been at the ball, the guests were to wear dominoes and masks.

"What did I tell you?" queried Stephane. "Was I right? Will you come?"

I turned the matter over in my mind for a moment.

I thought with horror of all that was around me of all I must forget that evening. In which head could I find rest now that my father's heart was closer against me?

"Yes, Stephane," I exclaimed . . . "I will go because I am bored, but I shall not wear a mask . . ."

X

As I spoke, I crushed in my hand a letter which I had written to my father last evening before falling asleep ; a passionate letter filled with our ephemeral happiness, a letter that was like a cry of love. I had intended to give it to him this morning, but the change in his look had prevented my doing so. I had thought of posting it somewhere ; then it seemed to me that there was no use in doing that. Why should I give him the chance to tear it up ? And why should I give the Princesse Olkonsky the opportunity of making fun at me ?

On reaching home I dressed for the ball, heedless of what was being said to me, callous about coming events, finding for the first time in my Nihilism a sort of terrible support on which I leant as on a diamond pillar, and when I was ready, I sat down to re-read my letter, the letter I never sent. Here it is :

“ Father, I am writing to you before I go to sleep, and it seems as if your eyes are looking at me. Your glance enwraps and protects me ; I seem to have brought it with me.

“ To-night, Father, we have been very near to each other. Let to-morrow bring what it will, I have heard to-night more distinctly than anyone else the beating of your heart.

"Father, I am full of faults, and I have done many wrong things. I may have hurt you, but I did not mean to do so, and I love you . . . Do you not feel how much I love you? I do so wish you did. I have always longed for you to open your arms to me. I would have rushed into them and have forgotten everything else in the world, have forgotten myself.

"I longed for you when I was a child I longed for you when I was ill. I have always watched for the opening of a door and your appearing on the threshold, your dear face bright, gentle, soothing, as after a misunderstanding, those endless misunderstandings between human beings which spring up almost with the first breath we draw.

"Father, how lonely, how terribly lonely people are in this world! There is nothing so lonely as a human being . . . No two ever succeed in being one . . . and yet, since we were together a moment ago, I know that I am part and parcel of you.

"I am your son, and am part of you. My weaknesses, my backslidings and my caprices have come from you. I feel that I am yours for ever.

"We are going to have war, father, and men will hate one another, but you and I will love each other . . . If we must weep, we will weep together, my heart shall beat with yours, you will bend your head close to mine . . .

"Promise, father, that you will not allow ideas to come between us.

"Ideas are nothing. You are a master of thought, and you must not be angry when I say that ideas are nothing. They are of no value compared with human beings. Human beings are all that matter, and no

ideas must be allowed to come between them. Not one of them can compensate for the suffering of a human creature. Even the greatest is not worth a minute of grief which hurts like physical pain.

"There is no thought worth a human face . . .

"Father, I was watching your dear face to-night. You were very pale. Nothing is so disturbing as watching a beloved face. It is torture, sweet and terrible . . . To look at the temple, for instance, at a spot near the eyes where, seeing the fragile veins, we feel the blood might cease to flow; we would remember those dear eyes afterwards—the thought is like a knife in one's heart.

"Father, father, do feel that I love you. Your face would not agitate me as it does if I didn't love you. Is there anyone else in the world whom it moves as it does me?

"There is something physical in the feeling I have for you, as there is in all the keenest feelings, in grief as in joy . . .

"When I think of the love I feel for you, I am happy to suffer because of you. It seems to me that if I could only solve the mystery that separates us, I should have no regrets about anything, that I should be indifferent even to the mystery of life itself.

"Father, father, do feel how greatly I love you. . . ."

XI

September 18.

But the letter never went.

And I went to the ball.

I went to it as a man drugs himself, asking peace and forgetfulness from opium or morphine.

And I stepped into the ball-room as if the affair had been got up in my honour to celebrate my adolescence drawing to its close, and I went in unmasked among all those black faces . . .

For everyone was wearing a mask that night, even Stephane. Everyone was masked so that no one should be recognised, a mask over the real mask, the face given them by the gods.

Everybody was there. Everyone in my city and in my set was there under the protecting masks that gave secrecy to the hypocrite.

I alone, with uncovered face, seemed to bear the burden and the responsibility of the entertainment . . . I seemed to be the person in whose honour it was given, and who would have to bear the responsibility of it before the insulted ages . . . for I only had given my name . . .

I alone said to the centuries: "I am here!" for all the others were hidden under the uniform mask.

Masked was the mistress of the house, she who was usually so bold-faced, who ordered everything, gave directions to the band, and received the guests. Masked too, was Mme. Barchilde, who had begged for an invitation a week ago, and was easily recognisable under any disguise by her street-walker's manner; masked, likewise, the Duchesse de Vallière, so alluring, so pale, and whose turquoise glance met mine from under her defence, which might, in the way she wore it, have been painted by Longhi. Masked, like the others, was the little Princesse de Waterloo, whose defeat-recalling name was, with her, always one of love victorious; masked, as well, Madame Lilienthal, and masked, the Princesse de Poilly, who looked like a boy, and for the first time could readily forget her sex. Everywhere, masks, masks!

For the ball-room was very large, and every room opened on to the gardens. The terrace itself seemed to be only a cooler drawing-room, while on the lawn, the guests, streaming from every side, were innumerable, many-coloured and of every variety, but all wearing the same black mask, the eternal, mysterious mask, just as at a moonlight fancy-dress ball in Italy.

Masked was the tall Duchesse de Neustria on the arm of her masked lover; masked, the young Slav prince who, later, was to kill Rasputin; masked, the great Italian poet, who, ere long, will pretend that he has saved Italy; masked, Madame de Swinge, so pale under the velvety disguise that she looked like a youthful corpse revived for the space of a night; masked, Madame d'Erfulhes, so tall and slender that her height alone would betray her, a nocturnal dragonfly fluttering black wings.

Everybody was at the ball, and everybody masked . . .

That domino that keeps coming and going, now hiding, now slipping away, peeping from under his mask in the light—oh laugh, heart of mine, laugh loud, for it is my uncle de Myre, my uncle de Myre himself, with his colourless Punchinello-mourner face, my poor uncle de Myre, who could not resist this amazing opportunity of escaping from the watchfulness of my two aunts.

More masks, and yet more, keep coming in !

Masked is the Abbé Voisenon, who never misses a ball, and who, accustomed to the cassock, has, in his domino, the deportment of a dowager. And masked, Jean Baptiste Lovenstein, who meditates writing a worthless fashionable drama, and is here to take notes like a reporter. They also are masked who frankly enjoy and desire a night's pleasure ; those, too, who care for none of these things ; and those who are about to die !

O vanished youthful faces, friends of my youth, you were all there that night, light-hearted and care-free. Why did you not snatch off your masks so that death might, ere it struck, know those that it must spare ? You came masked to pleasure ; you were marched to death with bare faces, oh ! so painfully bare. You, Alan de Prafontal, Robert de Bruine, Charles Hermanger, and you, who was my dearest friend, who would have laid down your life for me, you have perished in the slaughter. Heroes of a futile cause !

Masks, and masks, and still more masks . . .

Masked, Jeanne de Louvecienne with golden locks, standing by her son, who is also masked ; masked

is Marie Thérèse d'Avrignan, whom I failed to recognise, so perfect was her disguise, till I caught the peculiar odour that ever emanates from her, a perfume of hot, never-satiated flesh. Masked, Joseph Nulpart, who might be chosen Minister of Death to the undertakers—Joseph Nulpart, restless, chattering, untrustworthy, concealing beneath the mask on his face the treason in his soul. And masked, the Marquis de Barcelonnette; masked the Duchesse d'Ascalati, arm-in-arm with her lover; masked, the Infant Don Carlos with the friend he loved.

Dance of the Death of mankind! Every member of society is there, of that august mob that puts on airs and forms a sort of company of the pariahs and the elect. Not one failed to answer the call. Men and women, handsome and ugly, all put on their masks, and crowded to the scene of pleasure for the last time.

All the women who have loved me are there also, hiding, as it were, behind their masks; I know so many of the eyes under those black masks, so many of the lips concealed by the black satin, that it is no longer my face that seems uncovered, but my whole person that is nude . . .

Masked are the women who loved me; masked the women who in their rapture whispered my name; masked the women who moaned under the pressure of my embrace. Masked are the women who came to me as to a young god who dispensed happiness. . .

Masks, masks, everywhere.

And eyes shine, shine under the dark stuff, shine under the velvet. Madame Barchilde's look is that of a salamander, and the glance of the Duchesse de Vallière is filled with seared sensuality, with bygone

lubricity, like a smouldering fire that seeks to flare up again. And all these masked faces seem to say :

“ Why is he not masked ? ”

“ Why is he not masked ? ” seem to say all the faces concealed under their silken bar!

“ Why is he not masked,” the smile of Joseph Nulpart seems to say behind his dark covering, “ since I have hidden my ugly, snarling-dog features ? ”

“ Why has the man dared to come with youthful face uncovered, since I have concealed mine, hiding under a lie my presence here ? ” Madame Barchilde’s smile seems to say.

“ Since I thought it proper to wear a mask, I who have the right to do whatever I please,” reflects the Countess d’Erfulhes, “ why does not he ? How has he dared to be so impudent ? ”

And so the talk grows and grows and grows.

Now a new masked figure has entered. The night is already far spent : the morning stars are about to rise : the rays of the earliest have already reached the terrace.

On the steps of the great staircase, between the vases of hydrangeas, under the Tiepolo ceiling which imparts to the Polastron mansion a touch of charm caught from Italy, a figure in a domino has just appeared, in violet and black, with the black mask *de rigueur* here.

The figure comes forward slowly . . . It descends the steps . . . No one appears to notice it . . . But there is something in the gait which I recognise, and which I seem to have remarked recently, quite recently . . .

The figure moves on ; passes close to me. It is she, Princesse Olkonsky ! . . . The eyes, the

imperious profile under the mask, are hers. And it was she who shed such tears this morning, who uttered such disinterested complaints, who protested so splendidly on behalf of humanity! . . . There she is, under that mask . . . She ends by looking angrily at me.

"Why is he not masked?" she seems to murmur. "By what right has he come here thus, when I, descendant of the Sun and Homer, grand-daughter of a Turkish ambassador and a Russian Revolutionist, I, the greatest musician of all times, have taken pains to conceal myself? By what right has he dared to come, showing the youthful face bestowed upon him by God, while I, like some spy, conceal my features?"

And the talk grows and grows and grows, fed by Madame Olkonsky.

For me the ball at last became like some vast reproach from which I fled in the grey dawn, when the first stars were beginning to tremble.

My father was still up; indeed, he could not have slept if he would. To reach my room I had to pass his. He was standing on the threshold, his lamp in his hand, gazing upon me with eyes full of reproach . . .

Was it I who, in his severe judgment, must bear the responsibility of the entertainment where my uncovered face braved the general hypocrisy? I could see that his thoughts were full of trouble, and they seemed to formulate a stern indictment on my late return, on the strange look in my eyes and the vile frivolity emanating from me which I hated. I felt that prayers, words, would be of no avail. We stood looking at each other, and his long, enquiring

gaze seemed to probe me, and to condemn without understanding me . . .

How could I explain it all to him? . . . I stood silent, feeling the misunderstanding between us growing momentarily more acute, and the grey morning dawned with cold indifference on a father and son who were never to find each other again in this world . . .

It was the most atrocious, the bloodiest aurora of the world, for it rose full of hate upon those who ought to have loved each other . . .

PART IV

I

The Big Guns are hungry; the Great Sphinxes of War, crouching on their shining steel flanks, thrust out their deep jaws that devour towns, and are sated with no lesser feed.—A. SUARÈS.
(*Images de la Grandeur*)

September 19.

Then came war; hideous, monstrous, ineffaceable; war between the living, that ghastly thing that destroys all hope in human hearts.

For mile after mile, distance beyond distance, limitless horizons, but one duty remained—to destroy life.

Everything went under. Golden youth gave up that life of which it knew nothing; at the head of their men mere children died who will never know the passion of a kiss.

Ah! let them sleep in peace, who unconsciously became sanguinary archangels. Above all, may those who fell at once, shedding no blood but their own, sleep on in sublime if illusory peace. My heart bleeds for them. My reason suffers for them.

When you died, Alan de Prafontal, my old class-mate, killed at the head of your men, could I do other than revere you who were brought down like an overthrown centaur? . . . Yet if the day ever dawns

when pure truth shall prevail, the manner of your death shall never atone for such a form of slaughter.

.

. . . Blood is flowing; blood everywhere.

Emmanuel Laroche, only twenty years old, he, too, must die, compelled to valiance like a feeble lamb—and not a lamb of God, but a lamb of the Ministers of men . . . He died so that his father could deliver a discourse by the side of a coffin! . . .

.

The days hurry on. I shall never forget them. I recall the excitement in the streets, the universal enthusiasm the first night that fell upon that hideous decision of the living, the first twilight in which the human soul faced that monstrous thing—War . . .

I recall the railway station to which I accompanied one of my friends who was leaving that very night; the first victim, the first martyr, destined to die with a beam of the peace of yore shining down upon him. I recall the stations, crowded to suffocation, breathless, the incessant trains which seemed to snatch up the living, to absorb them in order to turn them into corpses; I recall Paris becoming emptier day by day, its streets in the evenings suddenly bereft of all youth; I recall the early accounts of the fighting, the defence, the numbering of the dead, the amazing deaths of the first days—great army of pallid Heralds; I recall all the upheaval, all the hell, all the blood,—and my father, my father, the loftiest and purest soul there was, intoxicated with patriotism in the presence of all that carnage.

Father, what of those tears that you shed on that memorable evening in front of the fire?

.

Ah! think what a light Jaurès would have flashed on the world, had he lived! Think how, with his clear thought, Tolstoy would have helped us! Why could not you, their equal in greatness, speak out and tell the truth? . . . I know well that in your heart it was not the truth . . . Yet if only it had been spoken by a man like you! . . . If a man such as you had uttered the great word of love which was not spoken on the field of shame, the word which the Pope did not even trouble to say—that Pope so dear to my grandmother—he might have lost the present, but the future would have been his. You did not—and souls will turn later to a man of Geneva, in a Swiss home, solitary among the nations that are slaying each other . . .

Father, master of all generous thoughts, you ought to have been that man!

Why could you not rid yourself of that stoical firmness which led you always to stifle your feelings, and of that admiration of all which, in a word, is only death given and received?

My father, my father, why did you abandon me?

.

Then came the flight to Bordeaux . . .

Yes, that came also, the grim comedy that walked side by side with bloody mystery. The flight to Bodeaux, a roaring farce played by all concerned . . . Off they rushed, these people, while the armies drew near; in that scramble we witnessed the foul

burlesque of defeat. Men hurried off who had declared that Paris was dearer to them than life itself. Princesse Olkonsky bade the chestnut-trees a final farewell, wearing a dress suited to the occasion.

It was a time of horror and insincerity, a time when real thought seemed dead, when the beating of my own heart sounded as though it throbbed in a desert. And still the streams of blood flowed on . . .

Ye who never again will live, whose youthful blood splashed on a sanguinary ideal, who shall restore to the world your vanished power? Who shall write the poems you would have written? Who shall bring forth the masterpieces you bore within you, or reveal to mankind the loves in your heart stayed for ever in their flight? Henceforth the world will always be filled with masterpieces striving to be born, with stifled poems, with passions whose wings have been clipped by hatred. And what has become of the moments you lived? They hover between the blood-stained earth and the angry heavens, like souls in search of their bodily homes.

It may be, it may well be, that among the individual personalities which have been reduced to useless ciphers, there was our greatest philosopher, the man who would, perhaps, have eased the torture of living by discovering in his own genius a reason for our tolerating existence.

If it is to this that civilisation leads, then civilisation is nothing but an insult to man. Let individual souls flee to make way for the masses! Renouncing all freedom of thought and the nobility of its own personal aspirations Humanity is turned into an army of impersonal beings marching through endless night.

II

And then, suddenly, an evening in 1915 in our house in the Rue de Babylone . . .

I enter. The empty streets are quiet now. Paris has accustomed herself to death. Out yonder, a whole section of humanity is dying, young men from all countries, and Paris consents to continue to bleed from her great gaping wound.

The house is unchanged. My grandmother has now been with us for a long time. A masterhand at disorganisation, she keeps on the watch, resolved never to die ; separating us in order to reign supreme. And Princesse Olkonsky also is there, having returned from her wild stampede to Bordeaux.

My father has been deeply changed by the war. He only lives for that. He dwells wholly on the wound it has inflicted on him. Amid all the arid thought and false patriotism, his real patriotism is like a virtue ennobled by the beauty inherent in his own soul. And when he utters the word " My Country," it is with an accent quite indefinable, which has the sincerity of one who is prepared at any moment to die for her.

And he is suffering ! . . . Yes, he suffers through me . . . For am I not his son, bearing his name ? How cleverly people make use of the fact, knowing how to turn it into a weapon with which to stab him.

Has he not the right to ask me to make any and every sacrifice when he himself would not hesitate to do so ?

It is an evening in 1915, in Paris, in our house in the Rue de Babylone . . . I have returned shortly after dinner, and am feeling terribly lonely . . . Stephane himself is no stay to me during these dreadful days.

All at once I hear the house-door slam . . . It is my father coming in . . . I hear his step on the stairs . . . He goes to his room . . . I look at him . . . And once more we are alone together, before the fire, the everlasting fire . . .

His face is terribly changed . . . He looks as if he were exhausted by some mental struggle.

He has scarcely noticed my entrance. I am insensible to his glance fixed upon me, but I am conscious of a strange reproachful influence that comes from him.

He is seated in the same armchair where he sat on the night when Jaurès was murdered. I come closer to him ; for if he is suffering, we cannot be apart . . . But he withdraws the ice-cold hand I seek to clasp . . .

"What is the matter with you, father ?" I exclaim. "There can be nothing serious enough to prevent our loving each other. The greater the sorrow around us, father, the closer must we draw together, as one does in the distress of a stormy night."

"That is because the storm is an invincible force," he replies, "a force against which we are powerless. But, were we not powerless to master it, if the will, the energy of a single one of us could change the purpose of the heavens, what man would remain under

shelter waiting till the disaster occurred, what man but would dash forth to brave the mysterious forces he might quell ? ”

My father rises, and walks up and down. His step seems to repeat the sad rhythm of his own questioning thoughts. Then his eyes are bent upon me ; there is reproach in them.

“ I was at the Académie to-day,” he says, “ there was an important meeting. I saw a good many people ; Georges Hermanger, the Prince de Brignole ” . . .

Brignole’s son is a friend of mine. We were at school together. I am eager to hear about him.

“ Did he give you news of his son ? ” I ask.

My father remained silent a long while ; then he murmurs :

“ Yes ; Charles is missing.”

Dead youth seems to float in the air. I shiver.

“ Missing ! Charles missing, and you did not tell me ! Missing ! We were at school together. And you say his father was at the meeting ? At the Académie ? Did he speak to you ? ”

“ He was very calm,” replied my father, in a low voice. “ The boy has done his duty.”

How exacting that word “ duty ” sounds as my father utters it ! I suddenly feel as though I am living in the cold shadow of a statue.

But I want to know more . . . Seeing my father was at the Académie, he must have seen the Marquis de Valneuse. Some days ago I had heard that his son Jean, my childhood’s friend, was missing. I had not dared to ask his mother, the other day, when I met her ; she was too pale.

“ What of Jean de Valneuse, father, who was said

to be missing ? Is there any news of him ? Have you heard anything about Jean, father ? ”

“ He is dead.”

Dead ! Dead ! I shudder with horror ! My father had said it ! What has become of your heart, father, of that heart which once beat against mine ?

Two friends of mine, almost two brothers . . . One dead, the other missing ! . . . Our days at school rise in my memory . . . And both are dead ! We shall never see them again ! Nothing will give us back the light of their eyes ! . . .

“ But what about Valneuse ? He must be in the depths of despair, for he loved his son above everything, and could not bear to be parted from him for a moment. How does he take it, father ? ”

My father’s soul seems far, far away. And how far away his voice sounds as he answers me :

“ He is quite calm. Did not his son do his duty ? Is not such a death a duty in itself ? The pain which that death entails is a duty, too. And what nobler death could he have died ? Remember that this son of his belonged to one of those regiments of cavalry infuriated at not being so close to the enemy as the infantry. He dismounted, and went into the trenches. Then came a day when they attacked ; the Germans were reported to be near, and the men had to make for the place where they were supposed to be. No one knows what became of Jean, but a few days later, when that strip of ground was retaken, he was found dead, leaning against a hedge, in an attitude of command, as if, even in death, he were still ordering his men to charge . . . ”

“ Oh, father, father,” I exclaim, “ how terrible ! ”

My father's features stiffen into an expression of still greater reproach.

"Terrible?" he says. "Are you mad? If you only knew how moved, how deeply moved Valneuse was as he thought of the splendour of that death . . ."

And as he speaks, his pallid face looks like that of a martyr inspired by noblest thoughts.

"How splendid to die thus," he goes on, just as if he really covets for me and for himself that form of self-destruction. "Heroism on all sides; waves of heroism! We could talk of nothing but glory to-day. The air seems filled with the scent of laurels. Durmonde's son, the aviator, brought down two enemy planes; Valencay's son is killed; so is Georges Hermanger's, and Glorieuse's son is a prisoner. As for François de Brignole's son—you know the one I mean, he was your age, a mere boy—he died a few nights ago in the hospital at Bourges, with the Cross of the Legion of Honour pinned by its red ribbon to his private's shirt, and clasping a piece of flag he had recaptured from the enemy . . ."

Father, father, what do you mean? Would you like that to happen to me? Have I to sacrifice myself thus in order to become a son of your thoughts as I am of your flesh?

An icy shudder goes through me; I feel as if I were dying. Before me stands the man of genius who had given me birth, whose blood flows in my veins, whereat at times I felt remorse, at others, pride . . . He stands there before me, looking at me, and what he wants of me, what he claims of me, what he appears to wish for at this moment, is that I should die . . . die gloriously!

Has he then never loved me? Now, at this moment, when the call of affection ought to be heard above all other appeals, I could be dear to him only by upholding his pride, by becoming the living symbol of his beliefs. In very truth, something within me died at that moment. It was actually my own father, standing there before me, who appeared to dispose of my life in the name of the beliefs which upheld him.

"Father," I exclaimed, "if you think that I am a coward, take a revolver or any weapon you like, and kill me. It is not of death that I am afraid, but of becoming . . ."

What was the word that I intended to utter? With what terrible truth of mine was I going to attack the faith which transfigured him? Yes, he had as good as expressed his wish that I should go to the front, and this gave me the horrible impression that I meant nothing to him. But did I understand why he urged me thus? Was it not his belief that honour, country, duty, were such overpowering truths that men, in comparison with them, did not count? . . .

Just then I saw his expression become so moving, so tragic, so intensely beseeching, that I bowed my head. Though I was within my right in not accepting his beliefs, I could not insult them in his presence. I dared not in his presence pour scorn upon all these frigid chimeras which seemed to acquire a nobility of their own by passing through his mind. I could not cast down my father's gods before his eyes . . .

He was now by the fire . . . and, oh! so far from me! Never had he seemed so remote, not even on the day when there had yawned between us the ghastly void of a grave. His face had altered ;

it seemed to have ceased to be human, to have become crystallised in the contemplation of a ferocious ideal . . . How could we ever meet again after such a scene? Oh, I must go away. I could not bear to stay.

No reconciliation was now possible; the only concession I could make was to say nothing, to reveal nothing, in his presence, of the welter of thoughts within me, for that would have horrified him.

I walked to the door. My father did not look up; his face showed how painful had been the communication he had just made to me. Was he looking into his own conscience, that inward glass in which he could see his own soul?

He did not move while I went to the door, but he looked at me once as it opened . . . Once again I beheld the great eyes filled with thought, the brow, the veins on the temples, all his beloved features . . .

I was never to look upon them again . . .

III

September 21.

Ah, if I had only known !

If I had only known, father, how little ideas would have weighed in the balance ! I would have done anything ; I would even have contradicted myself.

The whole affair was so sudden, so dreadful. The very same evening, without seeing him again, I left France with Stephane. We went to Switzerland, to other places, no matter where ; a wild wandering in order to kill time instead of killing others, feeling almost that to be useless was a kind of atonement.

Months went by . . . How swiftly they sped ! I was determined to forget everything ; but at times my father's face seemed to rise up within my heart ; the memory of him stabbed me like a poniard. I could hear the sound of his voice, so terribly familiar to me ; I could see his luminous brow, his eyes, the last glance that he gave me at the threshold of the door. I had no news whatever of him. I even avoided looking at the newspaper in which his name might possibly figure. I thought too constantly of him not to do my utmost to forget him.

. . . No one in Paris had my address ; not even

my grandmother, nor my aunts. I lived outside life and death and hatred.

Then, like a thunderbolt, the news came. I saw it in a paper. My father was dying in a hospital . . . he had gone to the front in my place . . . and he was dying . .

IV

I cannot describe my return home. Even Stephane was moved. To think that we had known nothing of it all. My father had gone to fight instead of me. He had gone in obedience to his convictions, and was ready to die for them. And his death lay at my door!

I reconstructed the whole dreadful drama. Jacques de Merville, unable to make his son accept his beliefs, had himself gone to his death. Modestly and voluntarily obscure, he had joined the infantry—and now he was dying . . . that genius, that intellect, that beloved face, had been destroyed in the carnage.

It could not possibly be true. The paper must have lied. My heart scarcely beat . . . the night seemed one long nightmare . . . Was he still alive? Would he speak to me? . . . What is the despot on high for whose satisfaction such things occur?

And continually, continually, as we travelled on to where he lay, his face rose up out of the past, as I had seen it the last time, with the veins showing in the forehead of the mighty brow that was illumined by devotion to his faith.

He had known murderous encounters in the night and savage exaltation; he had flung his genius into the battle instead of transforming it into something that soared above it.

V

Oh, beliefs for which a man like my father can lay down his life, beliefs to which genius like his can sacrifice its youthful soul! Oh, phantom Idea which could overcome in our commonplace world that peerless martyr! Mighty Faith, radiant and cruel, you give me no hope, but I bow before your deadly might. For the first time, for the last time, in this train that whirls me along to the threshold of death, I bow before you as before a man-created God in whom I do not believe.

• • • • •

VI

Clean and bare in the morning light, the white-washed hospital looked like a convent of heroes . . . Yes, this is where he lies . . . But we are too late He whom I love is no more . . .

I am at once taken to my grandmother. In the room with its shutters still closed, my uncle de Myre, my two aunts, some intimate friends, and Joseph Nulpart are already assembled.

My father died last night. He was wounded four days ago, and they were able to transport him here . . .

But what do these details matter? What do any details ever matter? What does it matter about uncle de Myre, or my two aunts, or the people who keep coming, or my grandmother's hard manner, or Joseph Nulpart's undertaker-like obsequiousness? My father is dead . . . nothing else is of any account . . . He is dead, he who was all in all to me without his knowing it or my knowing it; he who was my very reason for existence. He is dead, he who was my soul

At times I imagine it is not true. A man such as he cannot disappear. We had so much to tell each other, so many things to discuss, so many riddles we had been unable to solve during my brief sojourn on earth with him. Never again can my heart throb; never again can my thoughts become orderly. He has died as if to prove how great a thing it is to die for a belief. He stands like a protecting deity between me and all the illusory ideals which I attacked; he stretches out his wan hand to prevent my destroying his idols. How could I insult you, Beliefs for which my father died? . . .

They come to take me to him . . . then explain that the wound is a dreadful one and has disfigured him . . . that death in reaching out for him struck at the seat of his genius.

It is autumn, the saddest season in which to die. In the hospital garden a nightingale is singing; wounded men come and go, not knowing that in there, silent for ever, lies a marvellous being who was as humble as they, and as full of the same disquieting renunciation of individuality. To reach the room

in which he has been placed, alone, I have to go through the ward filled with overgrown, mangled children, who on this day have thoughtfully silenced the gramophone. Another smaller room, and we are there. The person who accompanies me opens the door.

No ; I will not enter. I cannot possibly look upon that disfigured image of you, father, upon your distorted features . . . How could I ? I could never sleep again . . . I could not go on living. As long as I do not see you as you are now, I shall not wholly disbelieve in your everlasting Life. You will be by me, masterful and gentle, like a guardian soul. Absence itself shall not be able to part us, nor yet silence him who spoke so little to me . . .

But I must not look upon you now. I must not behold the formal denial of your corpse.

.

Thus I did not see him who gave me life, and who had returned to the void whence he brought me. I preserve an image of him that lives in my heart, a sorrowful but a human image. I have not seen his closed eyes, his lips for ever mute . . . Let others retain such remembrances. Let others see in him a great man dead ; for evermore I mean to see in him only a great man living. And yet he is dead . . .

How intensely he is dead ! How very dead are the dead, and the greater they have been, the more completely dead they seem . . .

.

Oh, father, my father, you that are neither in the heavens nor in any celestial region, but in the

ground, the dank and final ground, let your memory be to me a daily food! . . . You become God in death—let your idealism resuscitate me! From the depths of the abyss my cry goes up to you, asking you to bestow on me the faith that uplifted you, and to deliver me from the void! From the deep of the deeps my cry has gone up to you!

.

The watching by the corpse! My grandmother's face, her fingers on her wooden beads, her careless fingers counting out the prayers . . . You live again, incomprehensible days! Under the same roof as he, stunned with horror, I sat and wept.

But now you will never leave me. Until now, there were the times of absence, the moments when we met again. Now, you are with me, beloved, all the time, and I keep the eyes of my mind on your dear face which overpowers me, upon the wound I looked at only in imagination, your bleeding wound which cries to me: "I died for an Ideal."

.

Dreadful, of a truth, were those three days. Though we were parted for ever, I felt within me a strange, wild exaltation. Was not death less opaque than life; and the sentinels it sets on the threshold of life, were they not less vigilant than were Princesse Olkonsky and my grandmother?

You may watch, grandmother, at the foot of the bed just as if the body on it were your property . . . That body means nothing to me . . . It is my father, but since his power of thought has forsaken him, it is not my father, and the only tomb in which he is laid is my heart.

Could I speak of him thus if I had seen him as I did my uncle, stark and motionless?

No, indeed, for I still cling to one last hope: that his soul that seems to speak to me is not an illusion due to my grief. In the room where the death-candles watch over all that is left of him, there is only that poor little corpse—shrunk by death.

“But my works, my thoughts, my death itself!” he seems to whisper into the air. “How can I have become nothingness, I who proclaimed that thought is living, I who hoped in everything, who died to become one with my beliefs?”

Then, if a soul such as yours has thus believed and has died for its belief, something of it must survive, something of it cannot die. Did you die, father, so that you might compel me to believe as you did? For standing before your tomb, I am a believer . . .”

VII

September 22.

The organ is pealing. Although I have managed to escape from many things, I am not to be spared this function. I who did not hear the nailing down of the coffin, I shall have to watch it borne away by the soldiers when it leaves the hospital.

What numbers of people round us! Always the same everlasting faces, wearing a mask of grief.

Is it really you, father, that I am following on this rainy morning, in the grey October light, you who not long since were so alive? Is it possible that in this thing which I escort, this thing wrapped in a flag, there is all of you . . . even the dear face, even the vein on the temple? . . .

A strange thing is grief. Sometimes it becomes so violent, so physical, that it almost compels one to cry out. Suddenly, because I called up your face and imagined it dead, with eyelids closed and a strange frail look about the eyes, my heart twisted so that I felt I was dying . . .

The strains of the organ are heard . . . they seem to plead with the unbelievers who fill the church, they wail as if all humanity in its despair were imploring God to exist.

What are all these people doing, I wonder, round

that mighty corpse, round that finite and infinite being, round him who gave me life? Have they any notion, these lay-figures of life, of what has brought them here? Has the pale Duchesse de Vallière any idea why she is here? Or fussy Joseph Nulpart, who sees that he has another chance to come forward as a candidate? Or my uncle de Myre with his old charms embalmed? Or Princesse Olkonsky, got up in ghastly fashion as a Montenegrin mourner, wearing on her head a sort of hideous dish, embroidered with jet and pearls, that wobbles when she chatters? Or Paul Laroche, ex-President, who remembering, perhaps, the deaths of his sons, understands that it

Do they know what they are doing? Do they suspect the part they are playing, as they stand round that mighty Corpse, mighty yet so pitiful, in its narrow black space between the chairs of the chancel?

Do they perceive in some vague way that they stand for something lofty and symbolic? They themselves are but mean vanities incarnate, but they are also the incarnation of the whole of wretched humanity, so lonely in space, humanity ever to be pitied, no matter what it may have done, because it is itself in presence of the void; humanity which comes to implore God to exist, if only to justify its presence, begging him to punish it, if need be, for its crimes, but to exist, to exist, so that Life may not be all.

And the strains of the organ are their souls, although they know it not; their souls made up of all the pettiness of humanity, but redeemed by its involuntary anguish in the presence of death.

VIII

September 23.

I have fled from Paris. My father now sleeps in the country at Aigues-Mortes, at the foot of the mountains which he loved as a child and which look like lofty azure thoughts.

He sleeps in an atmosphere scented by the olive and the sunshine ; in the atmosphere in which I shall sleep to-morrow . . .

The moment the funeral was over I had to flee, and it was to our home at Aigues-Mortes—which belongs to me now—that I determined to take my sorrow. Stephane himself understood that it was useless to follow me, for how, indeed, could our lives blend now ? A single look of him who is gone seems to protect me from all my former life. A single portrait of him would suffice to expel the whole world. O, thou first Divinity of him who has till now had none, earliest object of my veneration, O best-beloved Dead, be my Country, my Conscience, my Duty !

Stephane laughed when I said this. The notion that I could ever break away from my former life, that I could henceforth obey one who was dead, amazed, astounded, angered him. He is too much of a pagan to be able to understand what can emerge from a grave, too pagan to comprehend that everything which meant nothing to me has become a truth

since it was immersed in my father's blood. He never believed I would persevere in my decision.

I have fled from Paris, and am alone in the Aigues-Mortes house, the silent house, the home of my childhood. There is no use in opening the door which leads to my mother's portrait : a more recent, more essential, more positive death now uplifts my life. A recent death that whispers words of encouragement and lights me on my way ; that which emerges from the grave voluntarily sought, that which emanates from him who has vanished, is an exhortation to be courageous, to be great, to live the life which has stirred in me only since it came to me from the dead.

I went to my father's room, and arranged everything as it used to be in his lifetime. The small Marcus Aurelius in bronze and crystal, the well-known books, the blotter marked with his writing ; on a chair, the hat dropped as when he threw it there on coming in ; and as I look out of the window on the landscape where his penetrating glance so often rested, why should I think my father really dead ?

And I myself am here, living his thoughts, safe in his ideals, wrapped in his memory, helping him to live still.

.

How came I, one day, to set in order his papers ?

I take them from the closet into which I put them all, and whence I have, so far, not dared to remove them.

.

Here are the materials for a new book of which he was engaged in writing the concluding pages :

Thus speak the immortal gods, a mighty symphony of courage emanating from the innermost depths of our race and his own soul. Incredible as it may sound, this is henceforth to be my life: I shall live to collect these posthumous manuscripts and to give to the world the very thoughts and beliefs I had fought against.

For a whole month I devote myself to the task. I compare manuscripts, add what is lacking, and my father's work comes to life again under my hands. An aim has been given to my useless existence, and I feel as if I am protected by an eternal mind. In this enlightening collaboration of Life and Death, a sort of persuasion rises in me to keep on assuring me that his soul is imperishable.

There are also other papers of my father's which I have not read and which I shall have to burn: all his correspondence. I glance over it on an autumn day, in front of the fire, on a day like that when, years ago, I saw, for the first time in my life, a dead man: my uncle.

Here are letters from other great men, his friends, and all Princesse Olkonsky's epistles. What is the good of reading them? They have nothing to do with me. So I burned those letters, and watched them writhe in the devouring fire just as my father had watched the note-book of my youth writhing in it.

The last envelope is addressed in my father's handwriting, and it bears my name, the Christian name that he will never again utter . . . Strange that the first letter my father has ever written to me should come to me after his death!

But a horrible presentiment overcomes me, an icy

dread . . . I am actually afraid of that beloved handwriting, afraid of what it may tell me. Why did my father not send me this envelope which bears my name? Has not the time for reading its contents gone by? Is it not too late to open a letter from him to whom I can make no reply, the letter akin to that I wrote him one day in the agitation of my heart and which I never gave him?

"Beloved," says the letter—that supreme letter, the letter which was never sent—"I cannot die without telling you how deeply I have loved you. Life is so strange, so swift, so difficult, a state in which we generally leave things half-said, in which we have no time to finish the talks we begin. Very often I reflect on the mysterious power which keeps us apart, the shyness of feeling that prevents our confiding in each other. Our ideas differ, but what are ideas in comparison with the human heart? Am I even quite sure, myself, of all the great beliefs I have enunciated? Am I quite certain that the armour of conscience and Duty which I wrought is not merely a buckler I have made as a protection against death?

"O, my little one, there are times when a man feels very proud, and other times when he feels very humble . . .

"If life really is a stepping-stone to higher planes, if we are to meet again one day, if the morrow is to recompense us for the abnegations of to-day, what matter sacrifices, concessions, human separations? But if in truth this is the final end, if this space of time granted to man is but a sort of purposeless halt on a star that is to perish in its turn, if ideals are themselves but inadequate torches incapable of lighting us through the maze, why not consider Love the

meaning of Life? How have we been able to live in this state of estrangement, almost as if we were strangers?

"We ought to have had but a single purpose: to cling to and comfort each other throughout the useless journey: the only solution to it all is a little love."

.

A cry of horror broke from me.

I was losing everything at once. That letter, overflowing with infinite regret, was an eternal farewell; the beliefs to which his hope on earth had rallied me were tumbling before my terrified gaze as if they were beloved, venerable idols. Nothing was left me but to die, even though the last gesture of the wan hand that held the pen had destroyed all hope of our meeting again in the void which had engulfed him.

I know that Stephane will publish this journal of my life. It will be found in my room addressed to him. He alone is, I know, sufficiently disinterested to allow my human personality to shine out of this journal on the world, as out of a crystal coffin . . . He alone is indifferent enough not to mind the criticisms I have passed on him . . .

I no longer have the courage to live, following either the advice he has given me or the counsels of my father. I wish him, however, to know that almost my last thought was of his intellectual and pagan wisdom, which I envy; and that my last thought has been of my father, my very last thought before I pass away into nothingness has been like a cry of love, useless and desperate, for him who gave me the life that fills me with despair.

My father, my father, you, too, thought as I did, and our ineffectual lives have been like those two letters in which each of us spoke out the truth that was in him, one of us receiving his letter too late, and the other never receiving his at all . . .

LETTER FROM THE DUCHESSE DE MERVILLE

To Monsieur Stephane Savage.

September 24, 1917.

Sir,

This morning at about seven o'clock, the body of my grandson was found on the tomb of my son, his face no paler than if he had been asleep. The doctor assures me that he had not been dead for more than six or seven hours, so that it was during the course of the night that the unhappy boy killed himself.

I do not quite know why I am writing to you. Yes, perhaps . . . I am an old woman. All those whom I love are dead. The last member of my family has just passed away. It may be that, no matter what horror fills me at the thought of you and of the unhappiness you have caused us, you are the only one in the world who may be moved at the news.

I have too often heard the last beat of human hearts not to be aware that the worst kind of love is often the strongest. I myself, who have always tried to live uprightly, am not certain that I shall feel my grandson's death as deeply as you will feel it.

In your own way, therefore, you have the right

to know in all its details the sad news. In your way you have the right to mourn with me for him.

God is just, but supremely ironical, and His irony "falls from a great height," as Father Margelle says. Does it not strike you that there is something bitterly ironical in the fact that the only two people to mourn over that early death are you and I who are enemies, who are to-day for the first time united by a common emotion?

Yes, my grandson killed himself last night in the churchyard at Aigues-Mortes, at the foot of our family vault, under the shadow of the tall cross where I prayed as a child, where my grandmother prayed as a child, where all the women of our family have prayed for generations, so that the cross is as old as our family.

The news will not appear in the papers. The people round here will believe that the death was accidental. There is no reason why the public should know a secret which does not concern it. Why should every family in our part of the country know that my grandson committed suicide?

Of course a Christian cannot but be horrified by this deed. The voluntary taking of one's life is an insult to God. He alone can restore what He has bestowed, and cause to die that to which He has given life. We do not belong to ourselves. But for the first time I feel as if I understand suicide, for all the details attending this case have a peculiar significance.

The time, the hour, the place, all combine to invest it with the majesty of sacrifice. If my grandson went there to kill himself, it was because he sought in the living moral of this God's acre a refuge from life itself. Too weak to defend

himself against life, he died so that he might be one of us still. And as every day of his life separated him more widely from us, so does death reunite him with us. And so his death becomes an act of Hope and Faith.

What he came here to end was his connection with you and the evil influence with which you poisoned his soul. He came here to be with his father. I once heard him say, "Death may prove to be a victory."

. . . My grandson's death is a victory, the only victory he could win, the only one that could save him.

The men who found him brought the body straight to the house, where I am writing to you to-day. They have laid him in the room where my mother died, and I shall wrap him in the shroud with which I covered my son. Two Dominican nuns are watching by the body as I write, thanks to the complicity of Father Margelle, who has been good enough to remit, in my favour, for this particular victim the penalties incurred by suicides—and I never shall admit that he committed suicide. The funeral service will take place to-morrow at ten o'clock in the parish church, and my grandson will be buried in the family vault between my son and his father.

I tell you this because I know that you cannot get there in time, for there is no train that could bring you here before the painful ceremony takes place. If, however, you should wish to come and place flowers on the closed tomb, you can do so; he for whom I weep is henceforth beyond your reach, sleeping by the side of his father the sleep of our tradition.

I do not wish to see you again, and all I now ask

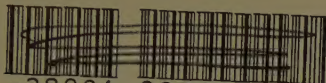
of the little of life that is left to me is to weep and pray for those of mine who have gone before me.

Let this last letter convey to you the expression of my feelings of grief, of forgiveness, and of peace.

ODOACRE DE MERVILLE.

November, 1918—January, 1920.

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